NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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No. 338. *Price, Five Cents.*

NICK CARTER AND THE WILL FORGERS

OR

PLAYING FOR A FORTUNE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

THE LIGHT THAT THE LAMP SHED REVEALED A SINGULAR SCENE—A YOUNG GIRL CROUCHED TO THE FLOOR, AND TWO MEN IN STRAINED ATTITUDES, EACH TRYING TO SEE THE OTHER AND EACH GRASPING A REVOLVER.

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NICK CARTER AND THE WILL FORGERS;

OR,

Playing for a Fortune.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT CALL.

"Will you oblige me with a light?"

"Certainly," and the speaker passed a lighted cigar to the questioner, who, having obtained a light for his own cigar, passed it back, saying:

"A fine night, friend."

"Very," was the sententious reply.

The man who had given the other a light, and who now went on his way, was Nick Carter, the celebrated detective. He was passing along a street in upper New York.

Nick was within a few hundred feet of the spot where the stranger had asked him for a light when something occurred of a startling nature.

This was no less than a woman suddenly rushing through a gate into the street, clad only in her white night-dress.

Nick was within five feet of her, so it was only necessary for him to take one forward step to be able to place a hand on her arm, which he did.

On feeling his touch, she slowly turned toward him a face that was ashen with horror. Her lips were moving, but no sound came from them.

"What is the matter?" Nick asked.

Articulation was denied the woman, but her lips continued to move.

"Make an effort to calm yourself, madam," Nick said, kindly. "There—control yourself—now see if you can speak."

"Thank God—I can speak," broke from her lips when she again made the effort.

"Now tell me the cause of your agitation."

In a hollow, chilled whisper there crossed her lips the terribly significant word:

"Murder!"

"Where?"

"In there," pointing toward a palatial residence that stood within its spacious, well-kept grounds, distant from the road a hundred feet or more.

"It has just been discovered?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"One of the servants."

"Who is the victim?"

"Mr. Jarbeau."

The detective was silent a second or two. Then he inquired:

"Has help been summoned?"

"Yes. A policeman has been rung for by means of the telegraph instrument we have in the house."

"How happens it that you left the shelter of the house?"

"I don't know. I heard a cry of murder, and came from my room; I went in the library and rang for a policeman, and then went to Mr. Jarbeau's room." The girl shuddered visibly. "I saw him lying there—my blood turned to ice—my head whirled—and I didn't know what I was doing or where I was until I felt your hand on my arm."

She now appeared for the first time to become aware of the scantiness of her costume, and blushing furiously, she fled through the gate up the gravel walk like a frightened fawn.

Before Nick was halfway to the house she had disappeared within its portals.

Having entered the house, the detective made his way upstairs.

The group of servants beside a certain door informed him in which room the terrible tragedy had occurred.

He stepped to the door and entered the room.

On the bed, bathed in blood, lay Mr. Jarbeau. A glance was sufficient to inform Nick that he was past all earthly help.

While standing there, gazing about him, but without having touched a thing, the policeman who had been summoned put in an appearance.

He no sooner saw the nature of the case than he dispatched a servant for the coroner.

Then he kept guard with the policeman until the coroner arrived with two companions.

They now approached the bed.

Mr. Jarbeau's death was ascertained to have been caused by a pistol ball through his brain. On the floor near the bed lay a revolver, one chamber of which, on examination, proved to have been recently discharged.

Near the head of the bed stood a small table. On this was discovered a sealed letter addressed to Mrs. Sarah Jarbeau.

Under the circumstances there was no hesitation whatever about breaking the seal.

It read:

"Mrs. Sarah Jarbeau:

"Dear Madam: At last has come the hour for making reparation to you. Before day breaks I shall be dead, and you will be a widow in name as you have been in fact ever since the hour succeeding our marriage. You are acquainted with all the facts, and know the fiendish story that was poured into my ears while yet in them echoed the solemn words of the marriage ceremony.

"It is not necessary to say when and how I learned the truth, but I did learn it at last—learned that you were all that was pure, and true, and good, instead of the hideous thing you were painted. Since the truth came to me, remorse has pursued me relentlessly. I feel that I cannot ask you to forgive me and live with me, and so I leave you. In the upper right-hand drawer of my bookcase will be found my last will, leaving all I possess to you. I ask only one favor—that you will tenderly care for my niece, Ella Jarbeau, and endow her when she is married at some future time. "Your husband,

"Enos Jarbeau."

After reading this letter, the coroner dryly said:

"Suicide!"

His assistant rejoined:

"That is, beyond doubt, the case."

Nick Carter, who had been using his eyes to the best purpose, now said:

"Are you positive of it?"

"I am," answered the coroner.

"Have you proved the course of the ball?"

"Yes."

"Which way does it slant?"

"Forward."

A gleam shot into the detective's eyes.

Nick saw a good reason for objecting to the coroner's theory. He was about to explain it when the coroner said:

"What business have you here, young fellow? Do you belong in the house?"

"No."

"Who are you?"

"Nick Carter."

"Oh!" blustered the coroner, abashed. "Well," he continued, hating to back down from his officious attitude, "if you've got any theories about the case, work 'em out yourself and don't favor me with 'em."

"I'll do so," and with this, Nick left the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING WIFE.

While the others remained in the death-chamber Nick busied himself in a lower room.

Seeing him in the house and closeted with the coroner, the servants all supposed him to be a person of authority, and came before him in response to the summons sent them.

He first questioned the girl who had made the discovery.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Jane Carey."

"You are a servant here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you do?"

"Chambermaid, sir."

"How did you chance to be up so late?"

The girl blushed, then said, truthfully:

"It was the regular night for my beau to call and see me."

"He came, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long did he stay?"

"Until nearly one o'clock, sir."

"Does he usually stay that late?"

"No, sir. And he wouldn't this time only his watch stopped."

"Well, he went at once, and you came upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you chance to enter Mr. Jarbeau's room?"

"I always do that every night about twelve?"

"What for?"

"To carry a pitcher of fresh water to his room. He wouldn't drink ice-water, and as he often woke up in the night and wanted a drink I always put fresh water on the table at the head of his bed at twelve."

"Then you always stay up till that hour?"

"I do, sir."

"Where were you entertaining your beau?"

"In the dining-room."

"Could you have heard any unusual noise upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you did not?"

"No, sir."

"You didn't hear a pistol shot?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"I can't tell, sir. It's been puzzling me ever since, for the door leading to the hall was wide open."

"When you went upstairs was Mr. Jarbeau's door open?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wider than usual?"

"It was."

"There was a light in the room?"

"There was."

"As usual?"

"Yes, sir."

"You pushed open the door and went in. What happened then?"

"I went across the room and put the pitcher on the table. I was going to turn away, but looked toward the bed and saw him all covered with blood."

"Was it flowing then?"

"I think so, but very sluggish like."

Nick smiled with satisfaction. Granting the truth of this, it helped his theory.

"What did you do?"

"Ran screaming from the room."

"Who was the first to come in answer to your cries?"

"Miss Ella, sir, the young missus."

"That will do."

Nick now began to question the other servants, but was unable to glean anything from what they had to relate.

There was, however, one thing that all agreed upon, and which to Nick had much significance; not one of them had heard a sound anything near like that of a pistol being discharged.

He now wished to see Miss Ella Jarbeau, whom he expected was none other than the young lady he had encountered at the gate clad only in her night-robes.

A servant took up his message and a few minutes later she joined him in the library.

She recognized him instantly, and blushed and looked confused.

Ignoring the fact of ever having before seen her, he said, inquiringly:

"Miss Jarbeau, I believe?"

Darting at him a grateful glance, she answered:

"Yes."

"Mr. Jarbeau's niece?"

"You have been correctly informed."

As he already knew her story up to the time of his entering the house, he did not require her to repeat it.

He said:

"Miss Jarbeau, the coroner believes your uncle committed suicide."

"No—no—he could never have done that!" she exclaimed.

"Can you tell me if your uncle always wrote his letters in this room?"

"He did."

"At that desk yonder?"

"Yes."

"Does he keep it locked?"

"Always."

"He keeps the key, I presume?"

"Usually. But as it happens, I have it now."

"How does that happen?"

"I wanted to write several letters and opened the desk for that purpose. By the time I finished, uncle had gone upstairs, so I put the key in my pocket."

"You have it with you?"

"Yes, for the night being warm, and it being so late before I commenced writing, I went to my room first and put on this wrapper."

"Do you lock your door?"

"I do."

"Then the key has not been out of your possession since you locked the desk?"

"No, it could not have been."

"And there is no other key to it of whose existence you know?"

"There is not."

"Do you know what kind of ink your uncle was in the habit of using?"

"I do. He always uses Arnold's Writing Fluid. He wanted to write a letter this morning and had to do it with a lead pencil as there was no ink in the house. This afternoon I went downtown, and among other things purchased a pint bottle of that particular ink. From it I filled the inkstand now in the desk."

Nick Carter smiled with delight.

"Will you open the desk?" he asked.

Ella Jarbeau unlocked the desk and showed him the pint bottle, and the recently filled inkstand.

He dipped a pen in the ink and made a mark on the paper. It was a pale, green-blue line that would not turn black for hours, while the letter addressed to Sarah Jarbeau, presumed to have been written not more than two hours earlier, was written with jet-black ink!

If there was no other ink than Arnold's Writing Fluid in the house, the letter was necessarily a forgery!

One thing that Nick had noticed while in the death chamber was that pen and ink were nowhere visible. For him to have written the letter, it would have been necessary to come downstairs to his desk in the library, if he had done which the writing would have been of a light blue-green instead of black.

About ten o'clock that morning Nick Carter rang the bell of a respectable house on Forty-seventh Street not far from Fourth Avenue.

He inquired for Mrs. Sarah Jarbeau.

"Jarbeau!" repeated the servant. "Shure there's nobody by that name lives here."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Is this a boarding house?"

"No."

Nick was somewhat puzzled. The letter to Mrs. Sarah Jarbeau had been addressed to this house.

"Now, then," said the servant, "are yez sure the name wasn't Blake?"

"I'm sure, yes."

"'Cause there's a teacher for the children as lives here whose name's Mrs. Sarah Blake."

The similarity of the Christian names decided him on seeing Mrs. Blake.

When she entered the parlor a few minutes later he saw before him a woman in age approaching thirty. She was a perfect blonde, with a magnificent figure, and an easiness and gracefulness of manner that were bewitching. At the first glance he discovered the only thing that marred beauty otherwise irreproachable, and that the color of her eyes. The color looked like a blue, as seen beneath a thin film of radiating green lines, giving the eyes an indescribable expression.

Keeping to himself the opinion he had formed of her he said:

"Mrs. Blake, I presume?"

She nodded gracefully and motioned him to resume his seat, she at the same time sinking languidly into another chair.

"You will pardon me, I hope, if I have made a mistake, but I came here looking for a lady by the name of Jarbeau."

"Jarbeau!" she exclaimed, giving a start.

"Yes," Nick said, and he noticed that she was eying him suspiciously from beneath her lashes.

The mention of the name appearing to agitate or distress the lady, Nick said:

"I do not desire to pain you, but I should like to ask if you know the lady?"

"I do," she answered.

"She lives here?"

"She does."

"Can I see her?"

"She is before you."

Nick had expected the answer.

"Ah! At the risk of giving you pain, I must ask a few more questions. Were you ever the wife of Enos Jarbeau?"

"I was."

"When were you married to him?"

"Ten years ago. But, sir, I should like to know your reason for questioning me thus closely."

"I am a detective, madam, and chanced to be present last night at the scene of your husband's death."

"My husband dead!"

The woman dropped her face into her hands and began to sob.

Her display of grief was pitiful. He could not believe it other than genuine, for he could not conceive of acting such as this must be if otherwise.

In reply to numerous questions she told him how she had become the wife of Enos Jarbeau.

She had been spending the summer at a little cottage on the coast of Maine. During a storm a vessel drove ashore and was wrecked on the rocks. Among the passengers was Mr. Jarbeau, who had been seriously hurt. He was brought to the cottage at which she was stopping and she had taken care of him during his convalescence.

In due time they were married by a minister living not far away, and took the train at once for Boston.

He left her to go into the smoking-car to smoke a cigar, and he did not return.

After the train had reached Boston, a letter was thrust

into her hand. It was from him, contained five hundred dollars, and said he had learned she was not a good woman.

"What I suffered," she brokenly said in conclusion, "only Heaven knows. What the foul story was I never knew, but he believed it and I would never seek him to refute it. I have never seen him since, and have earned my living as a governess."

It was a straightforward story and bore the impress of truth.

Yet, to believe it, was to knock his theory into a cocked hat.

He thanked her finally for her courtesy, and took his leave.

CHAPTER III.

NICK'S RESOLVE.

Nick went slowly down the steps and turned in the direction of Fifth Avenue.

A man coming from Fourth Avenue reached the steps before Nick had gone half a dozen yards.

He darted a searching and half-menacing glance after the detective, then commenced ascending the steps.

It may have been that Nick felt that look of the other, or it may have been the merest chance that led to his glancing over his shoulder.

At sight of the man he gave a start of surprise, for he recognized him as a noted rough and gambler, who was commonly believed to have been interested in more than one crooked transaction.

Nick had been under the impression that the man was in Sing Sing and his appearance in New York puzzled the detective more than a little.

"Can he be going there to see Mrs. Jarbeau?" Nick asked himself.

For some minutes he had been crediting the woman with having told the truth. But this little circumstance of seeing the gambler enter the house made him doubt her again.

He said to himself:

"If she has anything to do with that man she is a bad one, without question. I must shadow him and find out if they are connected in any way."

The gambler, on coming out of the house, some time later, made his way toward Third Avenue. He was followed by a man about thirty, with a face dyed that peculiar red hue due to hard drinking. This, of course, was Nick, in one of his famous disguises.

He was roughly clad, wore a slouch hat, and appeared somewhat the worse for drink.

The gambler entered a Third Avenue saloon and a little later the disguised detective came in, dropped into a chair at the table where sat the man he was following, and ordered a glass of beer.

The stranger eyed Nick furtively, but the detective's disguise was perfect.

An empty beer glass stood on the table before him, and the gambler now called for another glass.

The cigar he had been smoking he found to be out when he again caught it between his teeth.

He leaned forward and touched the detective on the arm.

Thickly he inquired:

"Will you oblige me with a light?"

As that request fell on Nick's hearing it brought with it a flood of light.

He had placed the man!

It was the same individual who had asked him for a light the night before close to the grounds of that house whose master had been foully murdered, as he believed, who had committed suicide, the coroner said.

Like an inspiration came the thought:

"That man is the murderer, or assisted in perpetrating the crime!"

And, offering his cigar, Nick said to himself:

"I must shadow that man!"

The fellow soon took his leave.

Nick followed close in his wake.

As he stepped outside, a few feet in the rear of his man, he saw a couple of men step out from a convenient doorway.

One held a revolver in his hand, and taking a leap forward, he said, sternly:

"Barney McCoy, you're my prisoner. We've got the 'dead wood' on you, old man, and you're a fool if you fight."

Evidently Barney realized this, for he made no resistance, only swore frightfully when the handcuffs were put upon his wrists.

Nick was near enough to hear one of Barney's captors say:

"You escaped from Sing Sing very cleverly, McCoy. If you'd been half as clever at a disguise, we wouldn't have tumbled to you."

Then they led him away, and Nick followed slowly, muttering to himself.

A minute later he slapped his thigh and exclaimed:

"By thunder, I've hit it. The governor of the State is at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. I'll go and see him at once."

The clerk knew Nick well, and when the detective handed him his card, it was quickly sent to the room of the State's highest officer.

The reply that came back was a request that Nick would come to his room.

After salutations had been exchanged, Nick said:

"Governor, I want to go to Sing Sing as a convict."

The governor gazed at him blankly, and slowly articulated:

"What is that?"

"I want to be sent to Sing Sing."

"Are you crazy, Carter?"

"Not a bit of it."

"You know what you are saying, and are in earnest?"

"Yes," to both questions.

A lengthy and confidential conversation followed, and then Nick arose to go. At parting, his excellency shook him by the hand and said:

"You have my best wishes for success, Carter. You shall go to Sing Sing as a convict inside of two weeks."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER IN SING SING.

The more Nick extended his investigations, the more certain it became that Mr. Jarbeau had indeed been married, and all the evidence indicated that it was to the woman known at Sarah Blake.

This being true did away with the idea with that part of his original theory that a doctored marriage was a part of the scheme of plunder.

If Sarah Blake could prove her marriage to Mr. Jarbeau, all the evidence he could bring forward in regard to the forged letter would not disturb her claim.

The following morning had been appointed for the burial of Mr. Jarbeau.

Nick attended, but in disguise.

Chief among the mourners, in widow's weeds, was Sarah Blake.

The will had been found in the place designated in the letter found on the table beside the dead man's bed. On returning from the cemetery the will was opened and was found to convey everything to his "wronged wife Sarah, as a partial compensation for the suffering he had caused her."

Nothing was left to his niece, Ella—there was not even a kind word for her, which almost broke her little heart.

"Cheer up," Nick slyly whispered in her ear. "Dry your tears and have a brave heart. Your uncle could never have treated you thus. That will is a forgery, and before I am done I will prove it so."

She recognized his voice, and through her tears smiled her thanks for his encouraging words.

"One last injunction," Nick said. "This woman may seek to drive you out. Don't go until she actually orders you to do so. And keep your eyes and ears open!"

"I will," she said.

At two o'clock that afternoon Nick left the Grand Central Depot by the fast express.

He left the train at Poughkeepsie.

At ten o'clock that night he halted before a handsome house in one of the most fashionable quarters of that thriving city.

He glanced at a particular second-story window.

"O. K.," muttered Nick. "A book in the window was the signal agreed upon, and there it is."

He picked up a small pebble and flung it through the open window.

Then he went to the front door.

It was presently opened softly by a man who preceded him upstairs, who, when they entered a room, said:

"You see I've got the evidence all ready."

He then said:

"Take a glass of wine, Carter."

"Thank you, I will do so."

The wine was poured, and then the gentleman, who was none other than the governor of the State, said:

"Here's wishing you success."

Five minutes later shouts and the sounds of a scuffle drew several people to the room, and Nick was soon bound hand and foot.

The next morning the papers teemed with descriptions of how the governor had, single-handed, captured a burglar.

The prisoner admitted his guilt, made no defense, and was soon bound for Sing Sing.

It was a lovely day when Nick Carter passed through the prison-gates, which had hardly shut behind him, when —clang!—clang!—clang—went the prison bell.

Crack!

Then a shriek of mortal anguish.

Then again:

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The man who had Nick in charge, exclaimed:

"My God, there is a revolt in the prison, and blood will flow like water. It's as much as your life is worth to stir. Do you understand?" scowling fiercely at Nick.

Then he whipped out two revolvers, and brandishing one in either hand, ordered back a mob of men dressed in the prison stripes who were coming toward the gate.

CHAPTER V.

THE REVOLT.

The moment when Nick Carter was conducted within the gates of the prison was a ticklish one in the history of Sing Sing.

The prisoners numbered more than eighteen hundred, and the guards or keepers, in comparison, were but a handful. The mere fact of the prisoners being here was an evidence that they were desperate men who had defied the laws.

Of course the deputy in whose charge Nick was did not know that his captive would willingly have assisted in quelling the incipient revolt.

He supposed Nick would hail it with delight, as affording a chance of escape, and when he saw that the convicts still advanced toward him he ordered Nick to lie down on the ground.

Nick obeyed instantly. The man was in earnest, and he did not care to risk being killed by a bullet from his revolvers.

"Halt there, you hounds! Halt, I say, or I'll open on you," he now shouted to the convicts.

One of them said:

"Who are you? You've got no business to give us orders."

"I'll make it my business, then. If you advance another step I'll shoot, so help me God."

"What's the matter with you? We ain't doing anything, except what's right. We're here because it's orders."

"That's an infernal lie."

The convicts had halted.

They appeared to be discussing the situation among themselves, while alternately glancing in the direction of the Poughkeepsie officer and to the rear of them, whence they had come.

From distant parts of the prison shouts arose, with now and then a pistol shot. Intervening buildings hid most of the scene of tumult, but now and then a figure clad in stripes could be seen dashing past an open space, and again could be seen a stern-visaged keeper with drawn and cocked revolvers in his hands.

Perhaps two minutes passed in this state of suspense, and then a line of prisoners went marching by an open space between two buildings.

Each man had his hands on the shoulders of the man before him, and all were marching in step, but with sullen faces and beetling brows, telling of bitter disappointment.

The guards, who, in their little towers on top of the wall, could command a view of the greater portion of the prison, were out on the platforms, each with a cocked and ready rifle in his hands, and several more within reach.

The squad of convicts who had been rushing for the gate were evidently in a quandary. Before they could decide what to do, a bareheaded man came bounding toward them, his hair flying on end, his face stern, and marked by lines of intense, but suppressed excitement.

Fire flashed from his eyes as they lighted on the convicts, and, in an ugly tone, he yelled at them:

"Fall in, fall in, curse your rotten hearts! Fall in, I say, or I'll send more than one mother's son of you to keep the devil company."

The convicts knew the man.

He was their keeper, a stern, firm, and determined man, to disobey whom was no joking matter.

Besides the four loaded revolvers that now were ready for them, two of the tower-guards were paying close attention to the little drama. The convicts could not fail to take in all this. It was a hopeless case.

Realizing this, they made a show of alacrity and cheerfulness in falling into line. But it was a hollow sham, for the bitterness of the land of fiends alone filled their hearts.

With his gray eyes gleaming with deadly menace, and watching them to a man with hawk-like vigilance, the keeper ordered:

"Forward, march!"

Not a word came from a convict's lips.

Along the line came a deep-chested sigh or two. That was all. They were again under control, not daring more than the cowed lion to menace the keeper, on whom is secretly centered a deadly hatred.

Obeying the keeper's orders without murmur, but only God knows how unwillingly, they marched in the direction of the gloomy pile of masonry whose narrow-barred windows told of the cells within the stone walls.

Nick was ordered to his feet, and with his guard followed close behind the file of convicts.

As they turned the angle of a building, a striped-clad figure skulked in a doorway.

The eagle eyes of the keeper spotted the man.

"Come out of that!" he shouted. "You'll be riddled as full of holes as a sieve, if you try to get away, and if you skulk I'll have you strung up."

The convict knew that his last chance had slipped through his fingers.

Stepping out from the doorway, he said:

"I wasn't trying to hide. I was waiting to find my own guard."

"You couldn't find him, I suppose?"

"No. I'll wait until he comes along, and then fall in."

"You needn't wait. Just fall in here."

The order was accompanied by a movement of the cocked revolver that was not to be misunderstood.

The convict fell in on the rear of the line.

A little farther on they passed by a human figure that lay prone and motionless on the ground.

The body was clad in a striped garb.

Little need was there to tell the history of his death.

A ringleader in the attempted revolt—a keeper's watchful eye and ready revolver—a report—a whizzing bit of lead—and then the blank of eternity!

In a few minutes the file was marched into the building and each locked in his cell.

Other files of convicts had preceded this one, other files followed, until all were under lock and key.

In eighteen or twenty minutes from the instant the prison bell rang out the alarm the last man was secured.

Not a convict escaped—save those who would soon be consigned to a prison still narrower, the prison of the grave.

This fact, however, could not be known to the prison officers until an examination had been made, which, of course, was the most important thing just then.

Pending the conclusion of this, Nick was delivered into the custody of a guard who was himself a convict, wearing the regulation striped suit, whose duties were partially those of a clerk in the business office of the prison.

CHAPTER VI.

A MASTER STROKE.

A couple of hours later Nick was ordered to report for registry.

He was conducted by his recent guard to the proper place, where he was called upon to answer a number of questions, his replies being noted in a large book.

"Your name?"

"Max Herbert."

"Where were you born?"

"In Buffalo, New York."

"How old?"

"Twenty-eight."

"What nationality?"

"American."

"Color?"

"White, I guess."

"Married?"

"No."

"Widower?"

"No."

"Crime?"

Up to this time Nick's replies had been prompt. Now he faltered a minute, and then said:

"None."

"I suppose not," said the officer, dryly. "Well, that question, as well as the length of your sentence, is set forth in your commitment, which I have at hand here. Look at me, sir!"

Nick looked at him, muttering to himself:

"Color of eyes, dark brown," he proceeded to inscribe the same in the book.

"Color of hair, chestnut," he proceeded.

"Distinguishing marks? None. Cuts or scars on face? None. Deformed hands or fingers? No."

Looking up presently, he said:

"You will now be measured."

A contrivance for this purpose was at hand, as also a scale for weighing him. His height and weight were presently recorded, and he was then declared to only want a number, a "crop," and a suit of bars to be a full-fledged convict.

These lacking necessaries were soon supplied, and Nick Carter, with hair cut so short that his head looked like a billiard ball, and clad in a striped suit, was marched away and locked up in a cell.

The revolt had unsettled the prison routine and the prisoners were kept in their cells, Nick among the rest, for two days, during which an investigation was in progress.

Prison food never includes delicacies, but even the common fare was delicious when compared with the food doled out to the prisoners while in close confinement. All were made to feel the punishment.

Of course Nick had no part in the revolt, but nobody thought of his being an exception, and he fared the same as the others.

When the detective ventured to say something about his being innocent of any part in the affair, a turnkey gruffly said:

"It's only because you wasn't here. If you had been you'd acted as bad as the rest. You'll do it the first chance you get, and can take this as pay in advance. So stop grumbling or you'll be taken suddenly sick."

Already Nick had learned sufficient of the arbitrary management of the convicts, to know that silence was wisest, no matter how roughly you were addressed.

The investigation having been completed, as far as was possible, those who were believed to be the ring-leaders in the revolt were sentenced to be "paddled" and then placed in the "solitary."

Lesser culprits were given lighter sentences. Not one who had taken an active part but received some sort of punishment.

Work was resumed on a Monday morning.

Nick found that he was destined for the shoe shop.

He did not much relish this, but as he had come here to take things as they ran, he must make the best of it.

As soon as he entered the room where he was to work, he ran his eye over those present to see if he could discern McCoy among them.

He was not there.

Being handed a knife, he was told he must begin at cutting soles, and was shown how it was to be done.

It looked like a simple operation, and Nick did not expect to encounter any difficulty in so simple a task.

The first time he tried he cut a sole successfully. The second time, also. But at the third trial came inglorious failure. The muscles of his wrist were not hardened to such labor, the knife slipped, and a piece of leather was spoiled.

Working at the same bench with Nick was a short, square-built, black-browed fellow.

Nick could not help feeling sorry for this black-browed man, evil as he looked.

"How long have you been here?" he asked, when a chance came.

"Four years."

"Got to stay long?"

"Three more."

"What did they catch you at?"

" 'Crackin' a crib.' Me and a chap named Barney McCoy were snapped up and railroaded here as quick as you could say Jack Robinson."

Nick's heart gave a bound.

Here was an old "pal" of Barney McCoy.

The detective glanced stealthily around.

He could not talk further now, for a pair of very keen and decidedly vindictive eyes were on him.

The chance coming again, he said:

"You knew McCoy well?"

"Yes."

"A good fellow, eh?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"Slightly."

"He 'Frenched' a while ago."

"But got 'nabbed' again. He's back now."

"I know it. I caught a glimpse of him this morning in the quarry gang."

"Did you know his wife?"

"You bet."

"A smart woman, eh?"

"You're shoutin'."

"Wasn't her name Sarah?" asked Nick, at a venture.

"No, Addie. Sarah was Addie's sister, and 'hooked' to a rich old bloat who dropped her afore she got her fingers into his cash."

Another interruption took place here.

The conversation was resumed by Nick's saying:

"What became of Sarah?"

"Don't know."

"She ain't dead?"

"Not as I ever heard of."

"Where's Addie?"

"In New York, living quiet-like, until McCoy gets out."

"Did the sisters look alike?"

"Very much. When they was together you could see the difference; but apart it would puzzle a stranger to know which was which."

Nick said nothing to this, but his face lit up with the revelation the man had given him.

Here came another interruption.

One of the managers of the shoe shop came along, inspecting the work of each man.

He stopped beside Nick watching him a minute, and said:

"How long have you been working here?"

"Since morning."

"Ever do any such work before?"

"No, sir."

"Ever do any mechanical work?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I don't think you'll get on well here, and I shall have you transferred to the packing room."

A few minutes later Nick was called on to drop the knife and follow a man who came for him.

The "packing department" was a room devoted to casing up the finished goods. The work was light and called for very little skill, and Nick got along well for a new hand.

But, now that he had learned where Barney McCoy was employed, he was desirous of joining the same gang.

He began to plan how the transfer could be accomplished.

Already he had heard it hinted that favors could be purchased.

The question was how to go to work.

Money he had in plenty, conveyed to him by a special messenger in the governor's employ.

He waited until the keeper stationed in the room was in a complacent mood and had saluted him jocularly.

Then Nick said:

"Boss, have you got any fine cut chewing tobacco? I'm dying for a good square mouthful of it."

" 'Gainst rules," was the terse reply.

"I know it," said Nick, "and I beg pardon for asking you."

At the same time he laid a dollar bill down, leaving just a fraction of a folded corner projecting from beneath a case cover.

He then turned his back.

When his eyes sought the spot presently, the bill had disappeared, and in due time a good-sized wad of tobacco occupied its place.

As a matter of fact, Nick did not chew, but it was not necessary that the guard should learn this. He simply passed it slyly to one of his companions, who was glad enough to get it.

In the afternoon, when the keeper was looking his way, Nick stuck his finger to his mouth.

The sign was understood, and another chew was soon forthcoming.

When the little by-play had been several times repeated, the sign failed.

"That means 'pony up,' " muttered Nick, and another dollar bill was shortly in the guard's pocket and a chew of tobacco in Nick's hand.

When Nick felt that he had put enough dollars into the

guard's pocket to be on a good footing with him he ventured on the next move.

"Blamed if I like this work," he said in an undertone, speaking to himself but at the guard. "I'd give a hundred dollars to get another job."

The guard turned on his heel and walked away. An hour later he said to Nick:

"What did you work at before you came here?"

"Bookkeeping."

"Clerking, that is?"

"Yes."

"You're handy with a pen?"

"I am."

"Young fellow, I kind of like you, and if I can get you a clerkship I'll do it."

"I'm obliged to you. I want to be outdoors, though. It would be worth two hundred dollars to me if I could get a clerking job in the quarry gang."

The guard looked him squarely in the eyes, then winked and said:

"That's a big lot of money for a convict to have."

"Not very big. Half down and half when the transfer is made."

The guard nodded and walked away.

A hundred dollars, put in the usual place, disappeared soon after.

Although the guard did not suspect it, the bills were all marked.

How the thing was "worked," Nick, of course, did not know, although he supposed it was through a "divvy."

Be that as it may, Nick was transferred to the quarry gang.

His new keeper took occasion to remark to him:

"Young fellow, you've come to me with a good word. That's in your favor; but don't abuse it. I can be a bad man at times."

"Guess we'll get along," said Nick.

His two hundred dollars had gained for him a pleasant position.

It was that of tally clerk, to take account of the numbers of carloads of stone that were quarried and sent to the kilns below, where the stone was transformed into lime.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK AS A GO-BETWEEN.

Barney McCoy was in the gang, but Nick pretended not to know him.

Of the guard he inquired:

"Who is that man there with the ball and chain on his leg?"

"That! Oh! No. 917—he 'Frenched' a while ago, and having been brought back has to wear a ball and chain now."

"Can I speak to him?"

"Not when I'm around."

Nick understood this to mean: "You can't speak to him right before my eyes; but I won't see you if I can help it."

Being near McCoy not long after, Nick said:

"Your name's McCoy, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"You look downhearted."

"I feel that way."

"Keep a stiff upper lip, my boy."

"What for?"

"I'll tell you later."

At another time he said to McCoy:

"I'm working up an idea to escape. I want a couple of men, and among them you, 'cause I've heard of you."

"Heard of me?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In New York. A girl named Sarah spoke of you. You married her sister Addie."

McCoy started as if he had received a powerful shock from an electric battery.

"You're giving me a 'stall,'" he said.

"I'm not."

"When did you know Sarah?"

"Nearly six years ago I met her first."

Looking keenly at him, McCoy asked:

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. It's five years since I last saw her. She's dead, I think."

An opportunity that was afforded McCoy to reply was not taken advantage of. Nick hardly knew what to argue from this silence, but inclined to the belief that Sarah was dead!

Then who was the woman who called herself Sarah Jarbeau?

He believed she was the sister named Addie, masquerading under her sister's name!

Could he prove it?

There came the rub.

After this last interview with McCoy, Nick came to a standstill for the time being in the solution of the murder mystery.

He did not see how he was to get any farther ahead in the matter while he remained in the prison as a convict, and he was seriously thinking of bringing into play the pardon furnished him by the governor, when a new turn was suddenly given to affairs.

His duties sometimes led him some little distance from the quarry in the direction of the prison.

He was some distance from his gang one day when a keeper hailed him.

Nick stopped and saluted, and said:

"What is it, sir?"

"You know McCoy?"

"I do, sir."

"Are you close-mouthed?"

"I am."

"You can keep a secret if it pays you?"

"As well as any man living."

"Well, here's a note I want you to give McCoy on the quiet. Here's a V for your trouble."

Nick pocketed the money and the note and went about his business, wondering what under heaven there could be between this keeper and McCoy.

He could find no solution.

He noticed that McCoy's face brightened wonderfully on reading the note, which he afterward tore up, taking care to chew the pieces into pulp before casting them away.

Nick was given a sly signal to approach and when he had done so McCoy said:

"I want you to take an answer to the man who gave you that note."

"All right."

"Tell him this: 'Addie will give him all he wants.'"

"He will understand it?"

"Yes; you'll remember the exact words?"

"I will. 'Addie will give him all he wants.'"

"'All the money he wants,'" corrected McCoy, and Nick, nodding, cut short the interview, as the keeper was drawing near.

Nick gave the keeper the reply, and in turn was given another note for McCoy.

Curiosity was, by this time, rampant, and Nick determined to see the contents of the note before delivering it.

He had so far gained the confidence of the keeper as to stray at will, and, rambling down to the still, he softened the gum on the flap of the envelope by holding it in the steam.

In a few minutes he was perusing the letter.

It was a revelation to him:

"Addie was here at the prison this morning, and left five hundred with me. She thinks she can get the 'cream' of the business by the time your escape can be fixed. Am laying plans now, but it will be a harder thing to 'fix' this time than it was before. What do you think of the fellow I am using for a messenger? If you don't think him safe let me know. Maybe we may want to include him in the plan for escape which I am studying up, and hope will be successful.

"YOU KNOW WHO."

"So the keeper helped him escape the other time," thought Nick, "and is working up a plan to let him 'French' again. And "Addie' was here. That was the woman who calls herself Sarah. This keeper and McCoy have some big interest at stake together. Possibly he was concerned in the murder of Mr. Jarbeau."

Securely sealing the letter, so that it in no way appeared ever to have been tampered with, Nick took it to McCoy. It was read with evident satisfaction.

"Can you get me a piece of paper and a pencil?" McCoy asked.

"I guess so."

"And an envelope?"

"I'll try."

By going to the keeper who had written to McCoy he obtained paper and envelope. The pencil he had.

Watching his chance, and writing a few words at a time, McCoy indicted a reply, which, in due course, was placed in Nick's hands.

As with the other, he opened it by means of steam.

"The messenger is to be trusted, I think. Count him in the plan for escape if it don't diminish my chances. If you need more money, Addie will give it to you on my order. Keep me posted, and 'fix' it so I can 'French' as soon as possible, for I understand a New York detective has smelt a rat!"

Nick read this exultantly.

The closing words were certainly in reference to himself and his connection with the Jarbeau murder.

More convinced than ever was he now that Sarah Blake was dead; that Addie, her sister, and now the wife of McCoy, was impersonating her.

Should he leave the prison he felt no doubt about his being able to find witnesses who would swear that the woman was Addie and not Sarah, and thus he would defeat the villainous scheme, and save for Ella Jarbeau the property to which she was morally and legally the heiress.

But if he did this, the cause of Mr. Jarbeau's death would, in all probability, never be solved.

No, he must curb his impatience and wait until such time as he held all the proofs in his hands.

The letter was delivered to the keeper, who, after reading it, showed much more friendliness to Nick, who never met the man now that he did not eye him keenly.

Nick had another "point" that he was desirous of working up. With money to pay his way, which, as intimated, was a great power within the prison walls, he found little difficulty in getting hold of a certain book of record long enough to scan a certain page.

And he made a discovery that was of great moment!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

The discovery made by Nick Carter, and which he attached considerable importance to, was this:

Hiram Leddy, the keeper, had been absent from the prison on the night of the murder!

The record showed that he had been granted leave of absence on that day at twelve. He had reported at the same hour on the following day.

Many a time a detective works by inspiration. He comes to a conclusion without very tangible grounds for an opinion, and not infrequently he finds further developments corroborate him.

In fact, to the unprofessional eye, it would at times seem as if a detective, put on a case, were trying to work it out backward.

Such, however, is not the case.

In the beginning, he bases a theory on such facts as are at hand; having formed this theory, and after weighing it in the scales of reason, he begins to hammer away to prove this theory.

If he stumbles upon fact after fact opposed to his theory, he abandons it and works on a new line. But he never gives up trying to prove his original theory while there is a shadow of hope.

So it was with Nick Carter.

The reader is aware what his first conclusions were, and how for a time everything he gathered was against his theory. But he hung on, favoring information had followed, until now, as he believed, he held the various threads of the mystery in his hand.

Whether the woman who now called herself the widow of Mr. Jarbeau was the former Sarah Blake—in which case she really was his widow—or whether she was the former Addie Blake and the present wife of Barney McCoy—in which case she was an impostor—was a matter of no consequence in the present status of affairs.

The facts of the case as they now were formed in his mind can be thus explained:

Mr. Jarbeau married a woman named Sarah Blake, who was an adventuress and who had a sister Addie, no better than herself. Years passed. Barney McCoy and Sarah, or Addie, arranged a scheme to secure possession of Mr. Jarbeau's fortune. While forming their plans, McCoy was caught in the commission of a crime and sent to prison.

After a time he had succeeded in interesting a keeper in his scheme, who, for assisting him to escape, was to come in for a share of the booty. By the keeper's connivance he had escaped. On the night of Mr. Jarbeau's death the keeper was absent from the prison. Where? Nick believed assisting McCoy in the perpetration of the dastardly crime.

To him this appeared to be the history of the crime.

At the present moment he had secured sufficient evidence to satisfy him that it was the truth, but it remained to obtain such tangible evidence as would convict the conspirators when brought up for trial before a jury.

Nick was by this time on quite familiar terms with Hiram Leddy, and being alone with him for a couple of minutes the next morning, he said:

"Aren't you a New York man?"

The keeper answered:

"I am."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"Oh, I thought I'd seen your face around New York somewhere."

"Maybe you have, but not recently."

"Then I'm mistaken."

"About what?"

"About seeing you. I was sure it was you I saw on a night some two weeks ago. Weren't you in New York about then?"

"Maybe I was, and then again maybe I wasn't," was the peculiar and half-suspicious answer.

It was sufficient for Nick. He was now satisfied that during that absence noted in the record book Hiram Leddy had been in New York.

"Guess I must have been mistaken," Nick laughingly said, cutting short the conversation for fear of exciting suspicion of an active nature.

From the frequent passing of communications between Leddy and McCoy, each one of which he read, he learned that matters were being brought rapidly to a focus.

The attempt at an escape was soon to take place.

At last a note stated that the day had been set, and that the keeper of the quarry gang had been "bought." This was the most ticklish point in the whole business, but Leddy had reached him with money.

It was not until now that a word was said to Nick, although he was well aware that they intended to count him in and secure his escape at the same time, if possible.

Leddy approached the subject very cautiously.

"I don't suppose you're over-pleased with what you've seen of Sing Sing life?"

"Can't say I am."

"Well, it is a rough life. Of course, a man has no business to do anything to send him here."

"Of course not," Nick said. "The worst thing in my eyes is that so many men deserve to wear the stripes who get off scot free."

The keeper winced, and gritted his teeth.

Nick feared for the moment that he had hit a little too hard.

The keeper, however, swallowed hard, and said:

"You're a sensible sort of a chap, and know there's such a thing as luck in this world. When some fellows pick up things that don't belong to them it's their luck to get caught."

"That's so. That was my case."

"I know it. Would you take a chance of 'Frenching' if you got it?"

"Wouldn't I, though!"

"Well, watch McCoy and stick close to him to-morrow afternoon."

"What for?"

The keeper winked.

"Can't you explain?"

"What's the matter with you? Explain what? I've got nothing to explain."

"But you said something——"

"A hint ought to be as good as a kick," was the rejoinder with which Leddy interrupted Nick, as he turned on his heel and walked away.

As a matter of fact, Nick was acquainted with all the details of the proposed escape, and had merely wanted to draw Leddy into committing himself in plain words.

The day passed without further incident.

In the solitude of his cell that night Nick debated in his mind which of two courses he should pursue.

Should he join in the proposed dash for liberty, in doing which he would risk a bullet from the rifles of the guards of the prison?

Or, should he communicate by telegraph with the governor, and get out by means of the pardon that was ready and waiting?

If he did the latter, the fact of the pardon would excite suspicion against him just when he desired, above all things, to obtain the confidence of McCoy and Leddy.

Yet, if McCoy obtained his liberty, he could not afford to remain cooped up here. If McCoy was at large he must be at large also.

And his liberty must be gained in such a way as not to arouse any suspicion of him.

He finally settled the question, and as he stretched himself on his hard pallet he muttered:

"I will take the chance and the risk of lead along with McCoy."

He noticed a feverishness in McCoy's actions next morning.

The man's feelings were easily understood.

The keeper also showed a little nervousness. He was conscious that he was in a risky business when he connived at the escape of a prisoner, far more risky than the manufacture of poor whiskey to be slyly disposed of at an enormous price within the prison walls.

The sun was going down the western sky, and the wearied men were beginning to brighten up at the prospect of a speedy cessation of toil for the day.

Barney McCoy, carrying a lump of stone, suddenly tripped and fell.

When he arose to his feet all noticed that the ball and chain were no longer attached to his leg.

"What does that mean?" demanded the keeper, angrily, as if this were not a cut-and-dried point in the scheme.

"'Tain't my fault," returned McCoy. "It just come off—that's all I know about it."

"See that you carry it down the hill with you, for it's got to go on again."

A car stood on the track nearby, being loaded with stone.

The keeper looked at his watch, then said, sharply:

"Be more spry in your movements there! And put on a decent load."

"All loaded, sir," was reported a minute later

"That ain't half a load. Put on some more."

"If we do we won't be able to budge it or control it after it's started, sir."

"Put on some more."

To be spoken to meant to obey.

Again the keeper looked at his watch.

"That's load enough," he cried. "Start the car out of the way."

"Now, boys," and the man in charge of the car, who had protested against loading so much, went to the assistance of his crew.

The car was too heavily loaded and would not budge.

"Can't start it, sir."

"Guess you want some 'paddle' for supper. Lay hold, a couple of you, and help them with the car."

Barney McCoy and Nick were the nearest persons to the car.

They sprang forward to give their assistance.

A little group that came close behind was waved back by the keeper with the growling remark:

"I didn't mean the lot of you. There's enough of them to start that car, and if they can't do it I'll know the reason why."

The car started.

McCoy and Nick accompanied it.

The heart of McCoy was beating fast and furious, and a choking sensation came into his throat as he heard the distant rumble of an approaching train.

The tracks of the Hudson River Railroad ran through the prison grounds. A portion of the distance is a tunnel, but the other portion is an open viaduct, spanned in several places by bridges.

The rumble of the coming train drew nearer.

It came in sight some distance above them in the viaduct.

It was a freight train and moving very slowly.

Suddenly something happened.

Two figures were seen to fly toward the viaduct, pause on its stone coping and then leap toward the moving train.

It was McCoy, followed by Nick Carter.

There was a moment's breathless pause, and then every man of the car-gang was racing like mad toward the viaduct.

A shout of alarm now broke on the air.

A second or two and then came the sharp report of a rifle!

CHAPTER IX.

BACK IN NEW YORK.

Nick Carter and Barney McCoy both alighted safely on the tender.

The latter was quickly on his feet, and with a bound or two was in the cab.

The engineer, with every appearance of fright, shrank away when he found himself with the muzzle of a revolver staring him in the face.

Nick meanwhile had tackled the fireman.

"Jump!" he commanded, pointing to the ground.

The fireman was as badly scared a fellow as ever breathed heaven's pure air, and without so much as a murmur leaped to the ground. He landed on his feet, but was unable to retain his balance and went heels over head.

Crack!

Crack!

Sharp, deadly, full of significance, were these swiftly following reports.

The train was now near the towers where the guards were stationed.

No more exciting minute ever formed a part of Nick Carter's life than this one that followed their capture of the train.

Would they succeed in escaping?

As they passed the guard-towers both he and McCoy crouched low.

It was well they did, for half a dozen bullets came whistling into the cab.

A few seconds more of breathless suspense and then they arose to their feet.

"We want this train to go faster," Barney savagely said to the engineer. "Give us all the steam you've got."

"Yes—yes—only don't shoot," gasped that individual, acting his part as natural as life, and in no way betraying that this was only what he had expected, and that even then he had in his pocket the money which had bought his aid.

Steam was turned on and the train began to move faster.

"Now, Max," said McCoy, "you just take this shooter and keep that chap covered while I take a look into the boxes under the seats."

Lifting the hinged lids of the seats he drew out a quantity of oily and dirty clothing.

"A good find!" he exclaimed. "Max, here's something to change the stripes for."

In less than five minutes each was clad in a suit of the oily garments.

Meanwhile McCoy had kept his eyes fixed on the track ahead as if in search of some landmark. At last he appeared to recognize some appointed thing, for he at once shut off the steam.

As the train slowed and finally stopped he shouted to Nick:

"Come with me."

McCoy led the way at a swift pace past the engine and to some point ahead.

It was a little point of land that put out into the river, and on which grew a quantity of flowering shrubs and graceful maple saplings.

Drawn up until nearly concealed from sight in the shrubbery, they found a boat.

It was launched from the lower side of the point of land which shut off all view of them from the train, and would continue so to do until they were well out in the river.

The tide was running down, and as they pulled for the west shore of the river they were being carried down stream.

In the cuddy, at the stem of the rowboat, was found some crackers, cheese, water, and a bottle of rye whiskey. These refreshments were not amiss.

In spite of the fact of the criminal side to this affair, Nick could not help experiencing a feeling of admiration for the cool head that had arranged so perfectly every detail of this daring plan.

Not a point or detail had been neglected.

Everything had worked as perfectly and smoothly as though it had been rehearsed a dozen times.

Whether the engineer played into their hands or not, it was impossible to tell, but certain it is that, although they watched closely, they saw no sign that any attention had been, or was being, paid to them.

Having reached the west bank of the river, they abandoned the boat and sought the shelter of some bushes.

They remained hidden until after nightfall, and then started out, McCoy remarking:

"Now, Max, we've got to stretch our legs well to-night, for we've got a long walk ahead of us."

"What's the plan now?"

"To reach New York. But as every ferry will be guarded that connects with trains from this section, we've got to go a deuce of a ways around."

"What's the programme?"

"We've got to hoof it as far as Piermont. There we can steal a ride on an empty coal train. The Erie has a branch there, you know."

Nick nodded, and said:

"Yes, I know. That's the big coal depot Jim Fisk built when he was bossing the Erie."

"Correct. Well, we'll work west over the Erie road, I think, as far as Port Jervis. There we'll get some togs to take the place of these. From there we'll go to Philadelphia. Another change of clothes there, and a couple of wigs ought to fix the business for us."

"A good plan."

It was carried out in every particular.

While detectives were guarding the ferries of the various railways running through the northern portion of New Jersey, they neglected to watch that of Pennsylvania, and the escaped convicts walked boldly into the city.

So excellently, however, were they disguised, that it was hardly possible they could have been recognized had a detective been on watch and seen them come out of the ferry house.

They went up Cortlandt Street to Broadway, and up the latter thoroughfare to City Hall Park.

Seating themselves, McCoy said:

"Well, mate, here I part company with you. Right sorry I am to do it, but I've got something on hand that makes it necessary."

"I'm sorry for that."

"Well, the best of friends must part, you know. Here's a little something to give you a lift," and he put a roll of bills into Nick's hand.

"Well, good-by," Nick said. "If you ever see Sarah, give her my kind regards."

"Sarah is——"

Nick knew he meant to say "dead," but he checked himself, and recast the sentence thus:

"Sarah is—in Europe." And he added: "'Taint likely that I'll see her very soon, unless she comes back."

In either case—dead or in Europe—Nick's purpose was served. If Sarah wasn't in New York, the woman who claimed to be Mr. Jarbeau's widow was an impostor.

When they separated Nick went directly to his office.

It will be remembered he was sent to prison from Poughkeepsie under a false name. Consequently nothing concerning him was known in New York except by his assistants, who were overjoyed to see him back safe and sound, as they had heard of his escape while in the disguise of a convict, and had been greatly worried over him.

Just after dark a bent figure hobbled into the Jarbeau grounds. The figure was clad in a faded calico dress that had seen better days, a battered poke bonnet concealed the face, and a stout staff made considerable noise every time it was punched into the graveled walk.

On the woman's left arm was a small basket, between which and the servant who answered her ring, she divided her attention, while she said:

"It's a fine night, that it is. I've come to see the leddy, the young leddy, shure, that's the old gentleman's niece. It's the young leddy with a swate face that they calls Miss Ella."

The servant cast a dubious glance at the visitor, and said:

"What do you want to see her for?"

"That's none o' your business, axin' yer pardon for bein' so unmannerly. Would you be after sayin' to her that it's Mrs. O'Connor brought her a token of thanks from Dennis."

"Sit down on that chair there, and I'll speak to her."

Wondering who the bearer of the unfamiliar name could be, Ella Jarbeau came out on the piazza.

"Arrah, darlin, is that you? Shure it's glad I am to see you, and I hope yer well. I've come to bring ye something that Dennis sent." This for the benefit of the waiting servant, and then in an undertone: "Miss Jarbeau, it's Nick Carter in disguise."

The quick-witted girl took her cue at once.

"Ah! yes, Dennis, I remember now. How is he?"

"Improvin' slowly, darlint. He's out to-day for the first time, and it's a bouquet he picked and wanted me to bring ye so's't ye'd know he ain't ungrateful."

"Come out on the lawn, my good woman. We'll find a seat there, and you can tell me more about Dennis."

They found a seat under a tree. When they were seated, Nick said:

"You have been well, Miss Jarbeau?"

"I have."

"Has that woman yet tried to drive you from the house?"

"She has given me more than one hint that my room would be more agreeable than my company."

"I expected it."

"But I pretended not to understand her hints. I had two reasons for not saying so; first, your advice to me; and second, a discovery I made in regard to that unprincipled woman!"

CHAPTER X.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

Nick gave a look of surprise.

"You made a discovery?" he said.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Instead of answering directly, let me go back a few weeks."

"Tell me what you have learned in your own way."

"Well, about three months ago, the housekeeper desired to go away for a month, to visit a son who lived in California. Uncle told her she could go, and she said she would see that her place was temporarily filled by a competent person. The day she left for the West a woman came who was addressed as Mrs. Martin. I conceived a dislike and distrust for her and avoided her as much as I could. On her part I fancy she disliked me, for once in a while I caught her eyes fixed on me with a gleam in them such as is seen in the eyes of an angry cat.

"When the housekeeper returned, Mrs. Martin went away and I never saw her again until the day that uncle was buried."

"You saw her then?" Nick said, with deepest interest.

"Yes. And she presented herself as uncle's widow!"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Nick. "Are you certain that Mrs. Martin and this woman who calls herself Sarah Jarbeau are one and the same person?"

"I am morally sure of it."

"Would you swear to it?"

"That I should not like to do, for an oath is too solemn a thing to lightly trifle with. Still I am sure it is true."

"If you ever saw her eyes there should be no room for doubt," Nick suggestively said.

"Ah! but I never did until the day of the funeral. As Mrs. Martin she always wore colored glasses, 'on account of weak eyes,' she said."

"Your old housekeeper is with you still?"

"Yes, although she has received notice that her services will be dispensed with."

"Have you said anything to her?"

"I have not. I hardly knew what to say or do, and was waiting for you to come."

"You don't know, then, where she found this Mrs. Martin?"

"I do not."

"I must see her and find out," Nick said. "If Mrs. Martin proves to have been this Sarah Jarbeau, another mystery is explained."

"What is that?"

"The presence of the forged will in a locked drawer, of which your uncle had the key."

"How is it explainable?"

"Easily enough. Your uncle's true will was in that drawer. When Mrs. Martin was in the house her position enabled her to go whither she would unquestionably. She discovered, by some means, where the will was kept—a will, please remember, drawn up by your uncle himself, and attested by the housemaid and your coachman. Mrs. Martin either traced the names of these persons, as written in their own characteristic way, or else she photographed the whole instrument, afterward returning it to the drawer, to which a duplicate key had been made. At leisure a false will was prepared, and the names of the two witnesses to the true will were forged so well that they swore the signatures were genuine. Now, then, while the will was ready, the letter was written only a few hours before the commission of the crime—hence the difference in the ink."

"I see—I see," murmured Ella Jarbeau. "When thus explained it is as clear as day."

"Do you think the housekeeper has any suspicion that Sarah Jarbeau is her Mrs. Martin?"

"I don't think she has."

"Now, tell me how I can see her."

"Go around to the kitchen door, and I will go through the house. You must pretend you want something to eat, and I will bring you into the kitchen."

"A good plan," Nick said.

A couple of minutes later, as the kitchen door opened, Ella Jarbeau's sweet voice said:

"Come in, my good woman, and I will see that you have something to eat, as well as something nice to take home to Dennis."

"Thanks to ye, mum; ye're a leddy, so ye are—may the saints always keep ye from harm."

This was for the benefit of the servants who might be within hearing.

"No thanks are needed," Ella sweetly said. "Sit down at the table there. This is our prized housekeeper, who will order you something to eat."

The next minute a ringing laugh echoed through the apartment.

It came from the lips of Ella Jarbeau, and was caused by seeing the old woman bending and scraping and courtesying in acknowledgment of her introduction to the housekeeper. Had life itself depended on restraining that laugh, she could not have done so, seeing Nick Carter for the first time in his singular garb in a good light.

Nick darted a warning glance at Ella, and motioned to her on the sly to leave the room.

Vouchsafing no explanation to the puzzled housekeeper about her burst of laughter, Ella withdrew after saying:

"I'll be back by the time you are ready to go."

"Thanks to ye, mum," Nick called after her.

When some food was placed before Nick, the cook asked

permission to retire, which the housekeeper granted, thus leaving herself and Nick alone.

"There's been changes here since I was last at the house," sighed the old woman, wiping a bit of butter off her chin with her tattered apron.

"When was that?"

"Ten or a dozen weeks ago. Sure it was ye that was the housekeeper thin."

"No, I was West then. Yes, great changes have taken place and others are coming."

"What became of the woman who was in yer place?"

"I don't know."

"Sure, I thought she was a frind of yours."

"No, I knew nothing of her. I wanted to go away a month, and as Mr. Jarbeau left it to me to put a substitute in my place, I advertised and she applied to me."

"She was a stranger, thin?"

"She was."

"She had references?"

"Of course."

"Did ye look 'em up?"

"I'm sorry to say I did not, for it has been hinted to me that she conducted herself a little strangely at times—although nothing was ever missed."

"I didn't like the woman myself," said Nick. "She had very quare eyes, I thought, much as I seen of 'em, which was mighty little on account of the glasses she wore. They was whitish eyes, the likes of which I never seen before and only onct sincst. An' sure that was the day of the funeral of poor Mr. Jabber (Jarbeau). I was goin' past at the time and seed a woman with the same eyes, dressed in black like a widdy."

The housekeeper's eyes began to widen, and the color faded from her face. It was thus she was affected by anything startling.

The apparently purposeless remarks of a garrulous old woman had suggested to her mind a comparison which startled her.

While the woman was silent, digesting the new thought, Nick scanned her face and pondered whether he should take her into his confidence.

Had she been going to remain an inmate of the house he would have done so. As she was destined to go away, it could not advance him any to share his suspicions and theories with her.

He had finished eating when he heard voices in the hall beyond.

Both were familiar to his ear.

"Who is that old woman, Miss Jarbeau?" asked Mrs. Jarbeau, and there was a hardness in her tone that bespoke ill will.

"A woman whom I did a kindness to once, when her son was injured. He is getting better now, and she came to bring a little bouquet he sent to show his appreciation of my kindness."

"Ah! Well, please to remember that I am now mistress here, and have no desire to entertain beggars. See to it that you do not offend again."

"I will do so."

"It will be policy," was the curt rejoinder, as Mrs. Jarbeau moved away.

When the young girl entered the kitchen she gave Nick a peculiar glance, which he interpreted to mean not to delay his departure.

Accordingly he was soon at the door.

Ella followed him, and whispered in his ear:

"I must see you to-morrow."

In a whisper, he returned:

"Very well. At what hour?"

"At dusk."

"And where?"

"Half a mile below here, on the road."

"I will be there if possible."

"It must be possible!" she exclaimed in a decided and earnest tone.

"Why so?"

"I have made another discovery! I can't tell you now. I must learn something first, if I can, by watching to-night. One word more."

"Go on."

"Be on your guard when you leave here!"

"What does this warning mean."

"I will tell you: When I came down the hall toward the kitchen she came from it. I believe she had been listening at the door!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGE HOUSEKEEPER.

This information was not of a character to please Nick.

If Sarah had been listening it was evidence of aroused suspicion. He was aware how easily criminals take alarm, and foresaw that his words to the housekeeper might be a revelation to the impostor.

And as he, in the guise of the old woman, was an acquaintance of Ella, who was most affected by the disposition of her uncle's property, the words would be given more weight than otherwise.

As he left the door Nick's figure became bent and he walked in an uncertain, crippled fashion.

The injunction to be careful, given by Ella, had due weight with him, and although he felt he was not being followed he did not alter his gait until he was half a mile from the Jarbeau grounds.

No one seemed to be following him and he started off at a rapid gait for the elevated station.

There was nothing more to be done that night and Nick headed for his office, feeling that he had it in his power now to draw the net together around his quarry.

By nine o'clock the next morning Nick was stirring.

By ten he was ringing for admittance at the former home of Sarah Blake, or Jarbeau, or whatever her name might prove to really be.

He asked to see the mistress of the house, and was ushered into the parlor.

The moment Nick saw her he was satisfied that no matter what Sarah Blake might be, she was in every respect a lady.

He said to her:

"Madam, I regret to intrude upon you, and have to beg that you will answer me a few questions about Mrs. Blake."

The lady's eyes widened with surprise, and Nick hastened to add:

"I presume you are her friend, and trust you will not construe my questions as at all reflecting on her."

"In that case——"

"You will answer all proper questions, you were about to add?"

"Yes."

"I will not ask an improper one, I assure you. Of course you are aware that Mrs. Blake proves to be the widow of a recently deceased gentleman of wealth?"

"I am."

"Ah! I took it for granted. Well, there are a few who have questioned her identity, and I am seeking means to shut the mouths of these people. For that purpose I am here, and I should like to know how long you have been acquainted with Mrs. Blake."

"Four years."

"Did she come to your house at that time?"

"She did."

"And has been with you ever since?"

"She has."

"Has this service been continuous, or have there been periods during which she was absent—say on a vacation?"

"She has never been away from this house for more than a single day save on one occasion."

"Was that recently?"

"Comparatively so."

"How long did her absence extend?"

"A few days more than a month. She went to Boston to assist in caring for a sick brother."

"Which proves her to be a good woman," said Nick, with mock enthusiasm. "As good, in fact, as she is charming. Ah!—by the way—can you give me the dates of her departure and return?"

"I can."

After reflecting a second or so, the deceived lady mentioned the dates."

Nick said:

"You are sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Positive?"

"I am. Why do you ask so particularly?"

"Because you may be called upon some time to swear to them in court. Do not be alarmed," hastening to reassure her as he saw a look of dismay come to her face, "it is an event that is not at all likely to happen."

At departing, he said:

"Madam, you have this day rendered me a great service, for which I thank you heartily."

He reached the sidewalk with a quiet thrill of joy upon him.

This visit had been attended with the most important result.

He had made another and a very strong "point," that favored the theory he had formed as he stood beside the corpse of Mr. Jarbeau. It was a "point" that went to prove that Ella Jarbeau's eyes had not deceived her when she said that the pretended widow and Mrs. Martin were the same person, for the month that Sarah Blake had been absent from the house of her employer, was the month that Mrs. Martin served as housekeeper at Mr. Jarbeau's!

CHAPTER XII.

TIGHTENING THE NET.

The sun had set, and the shades of evening were gathering when an old gentleman and a girl met about half a mile south of the Jarbeau place.

They were Nick Carter in disguise and Ella Jarbeau.

She looked troubled.

Nick at once asked her what the matter was. She answered him:

"Suspicion has evidently been aroused by last night's affair."

"Why do you say so?"

"I judge from various things. And she has watched me to-day as a cat watches a mouse."

"You are still sure she and Mrs. Martin are the same?"

"I am."

"You are right," he rejoined, and then proceeded to relate his interview of the morning.

"That proves it," she said, when he had finished.

"I think so. And now, what was it you said last night you could not tell me?"

"I had discovered something."

"Which was?"

"That there was a strange man in the house."

"Ah! How did you know he was a strange man?"

"Because I had previously seen all the male servants. There was also another and a better reason."

"Name it."

"The man was in Mrs. Jarbeau's room."

"How did you learn of his presence?"

"After I left you in the kitchen with the housekeeper I went upstairs to my room. As I passed her door I heard voices. I stopped and went closer to the door, when I could hear distinctly enough to recognize one of the voices as hers and the other as that of a man."

"But you could not hear what they said?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"Fearing lest I should be discovered there, I went to my room. I stayed there a little while and then started back to the kitchen, encountering her near the door."

"You thought then she had been listening," Nick suggested.

"I now know it."

"How did you satisfy yourself of it?"

"Listen! After I left you at the kitchen door last night, I went to my room. I couldn't sleep, and I seated myself at my window. Her windows are on the same side of the house. While I was looking out on the lawn two men approached. They stopped under her window and one of them whistled softly."

"What then?"

"She put her head out of the window and called down to them: 'Go to the front door.'"

"Ah! The interest deepens."

"I listened sharply and heard the men go to her room. I took off my shoes and stole in my stocking feet to her room. They were talking quite audibly, and I heard one man say: 'We missed her somehow, curse her!' Then another one said: 'Say him! That was no more a woman than you are.'

"Then the first one said: 'I believe you're right, and from the young fellow's lighting out, I think he and the woman were the same.' Then she said: 'It must have been that detective. You must hunt him up and get him out of the way.' The men said together: 'We'll do it.'

"Then a man who hadn't spoken before said: 'If the old woman was the detective in disguise, and the detective is thick with the girl, she must be looked after.' The woman said: 'Never mind the girl now. I will look after her when the time comes.'

"Then they began to speak lower, and as I was afraid they might come out unexpectedly, I went back to my room."

In a hearty tone, Nick said:

"You have done nobly, my girl. You are not afraid of harm coming to you?"

"No."

"Then you must continue to remain an inmate of that house. It will only be for a few days. I am gradually tightening in the lines, and soon will have them fast and safe."

"I hope so," and the girl shuddered. "I don't like to be vindictive, but if they really murdered poor uncle, I want to see them punished."

"They shall be; never fear for that. Now, have you anything further to tell me?"

"I have not."

"Then I must bid you good-night, for I have work yet to do before the day dawns. You are not afraid to return alone?"

"No."

"Then—— Ah! One minute. Will you be sitting at your chamber window at eleven to-morrow night?"

"If you wish it."

"I do. I may wish to see you about something. That you may know it is I who am there, I will cough slightly. In that case come down and speak with me."

"I will do so."

"Then, good-night."

"Good-night."

Ella went slowly homeward, while Nick Carter started back to the city proper.

When he was seated in a comfortable armchair at his office with a fragrant cigar between his teeth, Nick ran over the points of the case to himself.

He ended by saying:

"Affairs are rapidly nearing a focus. The moral proof, so to speak, is complete, but that circumstantial evidence the law demands is not what it should be. Now, to get hold of one of the schemers and force a confession that will implicate the others."

Thereupon Nick went to his desk and wrote the following note:

"Come to the Jarbeau house to-morrow night about twelve—not before. Mac is O. K. Important."

This he inclosed in an envelope, and addressed to Hiram Leddy, Sing Sing prison.

"If I mail it at once he will get it early in the morning," said Nick, and hastened to drop it in a near lamp-post box.

About twelve o'clock the same night he drew near the Jarbeau house.

He entered the grounds cautiously. He could see nothing of spies or watchers, and in safety reached a position on the lawn beneath Ella Jarbeau's chamber window.

The sash was raised, and believing he could see a figure behind the gauzy curtains, he gave a slight cough.

The curtains now parted and a white hand motioned toward the rear of the house.

A short wait was followed by the opening of the door, and as he quickly stepped inside, Ella Jarbeau exclaimed:

"Thank God, you're here!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DISCOVERED.

Nick instantly said:

"Something unusual has occurred. Tell me what it is."

"I will do so," she said, shuddering. "Oh! this is horrible!"

She was considerably agitated, and was some little time in regaining her composure. Then she said:

"When I parted from you I came directly home. I soon went to my room, and after a while tried to lie down and go to sleep. I could not. The clock on my mantle had just struck ten when I felt I must go downstairs and get a drink, for I was burning up with thirst.

"I was near her door when it suddenly opened. There was a bright light within. A man stood in the doorway.

"At sight of me he uttered an oath and slammed the door shut."

Ella paused, Nick inquired:

"Did you see him clearly?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe him?"

"I don't know."

"Surely you can say if he was a large or a small man?"

"I should say he was a heavy, thickset man, and about as tall as you are."

"Did you notice his hair?"

"Yes, it was long and jet-black, and he had a heavy beard."

"Did anything about his hair and beard strike you as peculiar? That is, would you suspect them of being false?"

"I believe not."

"Still I'm sure the man was McCoy," Nick said, more to himself than to her. "But, go on."

"I went downstairs and got a drink of ice-water, and carrying a tumbler of it, went back upstairs. After I got into my room and closed the door I heard footsteps outside in the hall, and then something was softly set up against my door so that if I opened it the object would fall and create a racket. It's there now."

"What next?"

"I was half frightened out of my wits for a while. I feared that they would come into my room and murder me. But after a while I grew more brave. I thought of you and that you were depending on my help. That nerved me to act, and act I did."

"What did you do?"

"My room connects with the one adjoining. I went into that, in my stocking-feet, and got into the hall. I then got into the room next to hers. Near the floor is a register, for ventilating purposes, that extends through the partition wall. When I lay down with my head near this I could understand much of what was passing."

"You heard something to the point?"

"Yes."

"Who were in the room?"

"Only Mrs. Jarbeau and the man I have mentioned."

"What was said?"

"I couldn't understand all the allusions made at first, but the drift of what was said was like this: The woman was afraid a detective was suspicious of her, and said he must be kept at bay for a couple of weeks. The man said he would soon 'polish him off' if he dared go out, which it would be unsafe to do. She seemed so nervous that at last he said: 'Well, I'll go with the boys to-morrow night, and we'll see if we can't 'fix' him."

"Has he gone?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"There was something said about how long it would take to get the 'boodle,' and then, suddenly, the woman said: 'You'll have to get me some poison that will do its work safe, swift, and sure.' He said: 'I can't.' She said: 'You must and can. Higglethorpe always let you have what you wanted, and will again.' He said, in answer: 'I don't know about that; the old chap is getting cautious. He didn't want to let me have the chloroform I got when——' He didn't finish the sentence, but asked: 'What do you want poison for?' She said: 'I have a use for it, and don't ask any more questions.' "

"What passed further?"

"Nothing. I went back to my room then."

After a pause Nick said:

"I'm inclined to believe you have something more to tell me."

"I have, and I didn't tell you of it this morning because I did not know it was of any importance. This morning I went into the reception-room, and while I was there a lawyer came. While waiting for her to come down I talked with him. When she came in she motioned me toward the door, and I was going when the lawyer stopped me. He said: 'It will be as well, madam, if this young lady remains as a witness to this interview.' "

"He then asked her a lot of questions about her marriage to uncle, when and where it took place, and she produced a regularly-made-out certificate of marriage. This appeared to settle all doubts, and he went away saying all legal barriers to possession would soon be out of the way."

"That is all you have to tell?"

"It is. And oh! it must be true that uncle married

her, for if he didn't how could she ever have got the certificate."

Nick Carter could not but smile at this "innocence or ignorance" of Ella's.

"A document of that kind," he said, "is very easily forged."

"And you don't believe yet she ever was uncle's wife?"

"I know she was not."

"I'm glad of that. And it's all a plot, then?"

"It is."

"And was—was—uncle really murdered?"

These last words came in a shivering whisper.

"He was murdered," he returned quietly, "and what is more, the man you saw in the door of her room did the deed."

"Horrible! And was she——"

"She was a party to it, although not present."

"Can this be proved?"

"I trust so, very shortly."

Ella's lips parted to make some rejoinder, but no sound issued from them. She caught her breath and listened. Thus for a couple of seconds, and then she gasped in an undertone:

"Mr. Carter, somebody is unlocking the door through which I admitted you."

He also heard the sound of a key grating in a lock.

The bolt shot back, the knob turned, the door opened, and a man stepped into the room.

He had relocked the door, and was groping his way across the room, when he suddenly halted and exclaimed:

"Somebody is in the room—who is it?"

Nick did not answer.

Click!

The newcomer had cocked a pistol.

"Lie down on the floor," breathed Nick in Ella's ear.

Click!

This time he cocked his revolver.

"Who is in this room?" hoarsely demanded the other.

Nick Carter, in a disguised voice, asked:

"Who are you?"

"None of your business!"

"'Ditto' to you."

"Answer up or I'll shoot."

"By what authority do you question me?"

This cross-questioning might have been continued for some time, but for an unlooked-for interruption.

The door leading to an inner part of the house was suddenly opened by the hand of Sarah Blake.

She paused in the doorway, holding a lamp.

The light that it shed revealed a singular scene—a young girl crouched to the floor, and two men in strained attitudes, each trying to see the other, and each grasping a revolver.

As the light fell across their faces, Nick Carter exclaimed:

"Barney McCoy!"

The escaped convict gasped:

"Herbert, by thunder!"

Nick rubbed his eyes, and said:

"What in the world are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" McCoy demanded, a frown beginning to gather on his face.

There was scant time in which to invent a plausible excuse for his presence. In fact, he was mentally floundering, when a woman's wit came to the rescue. It was little short of an inspiration that led Ella to spring to her feet and place herself beside Nick Carter, saying:

"He is here because he loves me."

Nick laughed, and said:

"There, Mac, the murder is out!" and then folding her in his arms, he murmured in her ear.

"God bless you, my darling!"

In folding her in his arms he turned his back to McCoy and was not conscious of that individual's movements, until a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and the escaped convict's gruff voice said:

"I want to see you alone, and first of all I'll take that 'pop' of yours!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NICK ARRESTED.

Nick Carter saw at once that McCoy wished to disarm him that he might have him at his mercy.

This did not suit Nick, and as he released Ella and faced the convict, he coolly returned:

"If it's just the same to you, I'll keep hold of my revolver."

"Give it up!"

"What for?"

"Because I want it."

"The poorest reason in all the world why I should."

There was a pause of some seconds during which the two men steadily looked each other in the eyes, as if measuring will power.

During this time the mind of Sarah Blake was busily at work.

She knew that Ella had seen a man with black hair and whiskers. McCoy now wore an entirely different disguise, and she judged Ella would not recognize him as the same man. Who this stranger might be, whom McCoy called Herbert, she did not know, but whoever he was it was unsafe to have him suspect any connection or intimacy between McCoy and herself.

So she now said, her voice strained as if she was only calm by an effort:

"What is the meaning of this scene? What are two strange men doing in my house? Answer my questions, both of you, and if I am not satisfied I will summon aid and have you arrested."

Fixing her eyes now on Nick, she said:

"You answer first?"

"I will do so. Some months ago I met this dear girl here, and fell in love with her. I am not as good a man as I might be, and her uncle forbade me the house. My darling clung to me, however, and granted me a stolen interview now and then; I came to-night to see her—the result is before you."

Sarah Blake sternly eyed the girl and said:

"Ella, is this true?"

The girl blushed and said:

"It is."

A dissatisfied expression rested on McCoy's face. He hardly knew whether or not to credit Nick's story. Looking at Ella, he said:

"Do you know that man's history?"

"As much as I want to know," she returned.

He bit his lips, then said:

"You are aware, I suppose, that he is an escaped convict—that he ought now to be serving out a sentence in Sing Sing?"

As he spoke he snatched a wig from Nick Carter's head, disclosing a crop of stubby hair.

The suddenness of the accusation caused Ella to recoil from Nick, a horrified look on her face.

Silence fell.

It was broken by Sarah Blake saying to McCoy:

"Now, sir, explain your presence here."

"Easily done, madam. I am a night watchman in the neighborhood. I saw and recognized this man as a suspicious character and followed him when he entered your grounds."

As he said this he winked significantly at Nick, as much as to say:

"Don't give me away; I'll explain later."

"Your stories may be true or false," Sarah Blake said, in an even tone, "but if you will leave the house peaceably I will never mention this intrusion. As for you, misguided girl, I will talk to you later. I had thought a Jarbeau would be too proud to bestow her love on a convict. Go to your room!"

Darting a glance at Nick in which trust and doubt were mingled, the girl left the apartment.

"Now," said Sarah Blake, "I will see you depart and fasten the doors behind you."

Going to the door she unlocked it and held it open.

"Go on," growled McCoy, speaking to Nick.

The latter, however, quietly said:

"Lead on, and I'll fall in behind you."

"Go ahead yourself."

Nick's reason for being particular on this point was because he fancied he had observed the woman make a sign to McCoy. Feeling that he held his life in the hollow of his hand, and realizing that the woman was keener far than McCoy, he would not risk anything he could avoid.

He insisted on the other's going first, and in this way prevented the whispered advice or suggestion that she would have given McCoy otherwise.

When they were outside the grounds, McCoy said:

"Was that story about the girl straight?"

"It was."

"You're in love with her?"

"I am," said Nick. "Was your story straight?"

"Of course not," and McCoy laughed. "To tell you the truth, Herbert, Sarah and I were trying to fool you, but I can see it didn't work. As a matter of fact, she's a 'mash' I made."

"That so? You're in luck."

"So I am. But she's a 'cooler,' I can tell you. I'm only waiting until I can get a slice of her money, and then I'm going to 'skip.' Which way are you bound?"

"Oh! almost anywhere."

"Let's walk quietly downtown."

"Suits me."

They had not gone far when a man overtook and passed them, brushing against McCoy as he did so.

Nick thought there was something familiar about the man, but soon dismissed the thought from his mind:

After a while McCoy inquired:

"Got any matches?"

"No, why?"

"I want a smoke," putting a cigar in his mouth and handing one to Nick. "The want of a match don't amount to much if there's a lamp-post handy," as he stepped up to one.

"Let's see what this is," said he, unfolding a slip of paper, "before I light it."

He glanced over the words written on it, laughed, and having raised himself, thrust the paper into the flame.

He did not throw the paper away until it was all burned, and then set a slow pace as he puffed away at his cigar.

The paper had been thrust into McCoy's hand by the man who brushed past, and it read:

"I'm suspicious of that fellow. Let him be sent back to Sing Sing. Pick a quarrel with him, and 'give him one' when you see two men coming. Look out for yourself. Destroy this! ADDIE."

Nick was on the alert and therefore was suspicious when McCoy suddenly became sulky in temper, and according to instructions, began to force a quarrel. It was against his own judgment, but he had such blind faith in the woman that if she positively ordered he always obeyed.

Finally two men were seen approaching in the distance, and McCoy began to growl harder than ever.

When the two men were very close McCoy angrily said:

"Did you say I lied?"

"I did not."

"You did. Take that!"

He suddenly struck at Nick with his clinched fist, but the detective dodged the blow.

The next instant he saw Barney McCoy running like a deer, while the two men came up, one holding a pair of handcuffs and the other a revolver.

"Hold up your hands!" he was ordered.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Nick.

"You want to know the meaning of this, eh? Well, I'll tell you. You're Max Herbert, one of the Sing Sing birds who 'Frenched' t'other day, and you're our prisoner.

"Hold up your hands!"

Nick, being slow to obey, the command was repeated, to which was coupled:

"We've got you 'dead to rights,' Herbert, and you may as well cave. I warn you that I will shoot if you try to resist."

To the officers' surprise, Nick commenced to laugh. Whipping off his hat and wig, he suddenly exclaimed: "I say, Ben, don't you know me?"

His captors started.

One of them was an old detective friend and the other knew Nick well by sight.

The detective exclaimed:

"I know that voice."

"Of course you do," cried Nick, with a laugh.

"Nick Carter!"

"Every time, Ben."

"Come over here under this lamp and let's have a look at you."

In less than a minute Ben was satisfied.

"Now," said Ben, "give us the meaning of this, will you?"

"First tell me how you came to make the capture."

"Why, I was paying a friendly visit at the station house of this precinct when a man came in, puffing and blowing, and gave us the point."

This was sufficient. Nick guessed at once how the matter had been worked. He said:

"Boys, I want your help to-morrow night, and I'm willing you should take the credit of bringing to light one of the foulest crimes that was ever committed in this city."

Suppressing only the fact of his having been to Sing Sing as a convict, he explained his connection with the Jarbeau case, and what he had learned.

When he mentioned the name of Migglethorpe, Ben said:

"I know the chap, a druggist over on Avenue A, who has been engaged in more than one crooked transaction, if it could only be brought home to him."

After the two detectives thoroughly understood the case, they grasped Nick's hands in admiration.

"I never knew a finer bit of work," exclaimed Ben, enthusiastically. "But now let's arrange for to-morrow night."

Their plans were soon formed, and then they separated for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ELLA JARBEAU.

A visit Nick Carter paid to the establishment of Migglethorpe, the druggist, on the following afternoon, was eminently satisfactory. His natural desire was to shield his customers, but, when Nick threatened him, the old fellow "caved," and admitted that he knew McCoy, and on a certain date had sold him a bottle of chloroform.

Then he said:

"I know it was his intention to come to you for a bottle of poison. Has he been for it?"

"No," answered the old fellow, his eyes moving uneasily under Nick's scrutiny.

"Careful!" warned Nick. "Should he be connected with a death by poisoning, it would be apt to go hard with you."

Migglethorpe winced.

"I don't know anything about a purchase of poison," he said. "But I'll tell you what I can do—that is, put up an antidote that would be likely to kill the action of such a poison as you might imagine he would use."

Nick gathered from this that the old rascal was lying, that McCoy had really got poison from him, and that in giving the antidote he was in a measure trying to shield himself.

Taking the antidote, the detective left the place and set to work to finish the preparations necessary for the night.

Night had just fallen when Nick started uptown. Half a mile from the Jarbeau place he met a boy; it only needed a few questions to ascertain that the boy was sharp as a needle.

In his pocket Nick had a note already written. This he handed the boy, saying:

"Be sure you deliver it into nobody's hands save Miss Ella Jarbeau's."

"You can count on me, sir."

"Wait for an answer."

"Yes, sir."

"If it is by word of mouth be very careful to remember exactly what she says."

The boy nodded, then darted away on his mission.

He was gone half an hour.

Nick advanced briskly to meet him when he saw him coming.

"Well, my lad!" he said.

"'Tain't well at all."

"What do you mean?"

"She's 'sloped'."

"Sloped?"

"Yes, sir—got out—left—gone—vamoosed."

Nick clutched the boy by the arm.

"Explain more clearly!" he cried sternly. "How did you learn this?"

"From a woman—the housekeeper, I think she was, and Lord, how she was a-cryin' over it."

"You went there and asked for Miss Ella Jarbeau?"

"Yes, sir, I did. The woman who was cryin' heard me and she come and asked what I wanted. I told her. Then she said as how the young lady was gone, and of a suddent; she wanted to know who sent the letter."

"What did you tell her?"

"That it was a man, but when she went into 'ticklers I said as how I couldn't say if he was black or white, short or tall."

"Come with me!" Nick said, in an energetic tone, and off he started in the direction of the Jarbeau place.

He was oppressed by a fear of foul play.

"There is something crooked about this," he muttered.

Reaching the grounds, he crossed to the shade of a spreading tree, and then said to the boy:

"Go and find the housekeeper and bring her here. Keep your wits about you and don't betray me."

"You bet I'm 'fly,'" remarked the boy, as he disappeared in the direction of the house.

In a few minutes he returned with the housekeeper. She had been told a gentleman, a friend of Miss Ella's, wished to see her, and the moment she saw Nick she exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, there's something strange about this. I don't know what to think, but I'm sure she never did it—no, never!"

"Did what?"

"Ran away with a man, and he an escaped convict."

"What is the occasion for such a story?"

"Why, this afternoon Miss Ella went out somewhere and she didn't come back. Just before tea time one of the maids went in her room and found a letter there addressed to Mrs. Jarbeau. The girl took it to the mistress, who read it and then began to go on like mad, and said something about it was to be expected. The girl saw the letter and it said Ella was going away to seek happiness with the man she loved, even though he had been in Sing Sing."

This intelligence stupefied Nick for a minute. Then he began to see through the plan they had formed for ridding themselves of Ella, of whom they were afraid.

"Did she go out alone?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"You are sure of this?"

"I am, for I saw her go. I noticed that the carriage went out slowly after, empty."

"Who was driving?"

"A new coachman they've got, a man with a squint in one eye."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nick.

The boy, who had been listening to all this, now said, excitedly:

"Mister, I know something!"

"What do you know?"

"Was the lady dressed in some stiff black stuff?"

"Yes," the housekeeper said.

"With a black veil?"

"Yes."

"And the team of horses was cream colored?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I saw that 'ere young lady, and the carriage stopped and picked her up."

Nick eyed the boy for a moment. Then he said to the housekeeper:

"The carriage has returned, has it not?"

"Yes, hours ago."

"Do you know where the new driver is?"

"In the barn, I think."

"Return to the house and keep your mouth shut," Nick said, speaking more brusquely than he thought, and bounded away in the direction of the stables.

A man was moving around within, and by the light shed from a lantern that swung from a hook Nick recognized him.

Ten seconds later the villain was gasping for breath; a hand was clutching his throat, a revolver was at his head, and a voice that rang with menace hissed in his ear:

"You dastardly hound, I've got you fast. Stop squirming, or I'll scatter your brains around this place!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

If ever a man was thoroughly cowed it was the villain on whom Nick had thus fastened his clutches.

When Nick's grasp on his throat relaxed sufficiently to permit speech, he begged like a Trojan to be spared.

"Where did you take Ella Jarbeau?" Nick demanded.

"Spare me! spare me!" roared the rascally coward. "I didn't know what they intended to do."

"Intended to do!" echoed Nick. "Have they killed her?"

"I—I—don't know."

"Where is she?"

"I will take you there, only be easy on me."

A horse was harnessed to a buggy and off they went, Nick not sparing the horse, but keeping the whip at work all the way.

The villain beside him, bound so that he was harmless, directed him how to drive.

"It's just there, sir," he said, "off in that direction, right in the most deserted part of Harlam Flats. It's a little shanty. I think I can see the shape of it from here."

"Does any one live there?"

"No."

Several minutes later Nick Carter stood before the door. He tried to open it, but found it fastened. Wasting no time in ceremony, he up with his foot and gave a kick that carried the flimsy barrier from its hinges.

He rushed into the shanty, calling the name of Miss Jarbeau.

The only answer was the echo of his voice.

He paused, held his breath, listened.

What was that?

He listened for the repetition of a sound that might have been born of fancy.

No, there it came again—a low, faint, almost inaudible moan.

He struck a match.

Almost the first thing his eyes rested on was a candle, which soon was shedding its light through the squalid place.

Then he saw Ella Jarbeau!

She was lying on the floor, one hand at her side, the other flung above her head, her face corpse-like.

"Poisoned!" he muttered. "The fiends! they shall rue this piece of work."

He dropped on his knees beside her. Not dead yet—the blood still flowed in her veins—her pulse still beat—respiration still existed.

With nervous haste he now snatched from his pocket the antidote given him by Migglethorpe. Prying open her lips he permitted the whole contents of the phial to go down her throat.

Its effect was magical.

The antidote had powerful stimulating qualities, and it sent the blood coursing more swiftly through Ella's veins, steadied and strengthened her pulse, increased the length of respiration.

In half an hour she opened her eyes, and presently thereafter she sat up and told Nick how Mrs. Jarbeau had

requested her to undertake an errand, and how after starting, the carriage had overtaken her and she had entered it, only to be driven to this out-of-the-way place, and there been given a deadly drug in a glass of wine that was forced upon her.

Nick was burning with indignation.

Curbing it, however, he assisted her into the buggy after he had compelled the villain to alight and had fastened him to the rear axle by means of the halter.

In this wise they returned to the vicinity of the Jarbeau place, not far from which Nick had arranged to meet Ben and his party, which numbered six men.

Into the custody of one of these the captured villain was placed, and then Nick and Ben and the five others started toward the house. Ella stoutly proclaimed herself strong enough to accompany them, and she went.

Nick's "fly" boy was flitting about the grounds and caught sight of the party. He hastened to meet it, and said the housekeeper had desired him to watch for Nick's return and advise her of it.

"Let her come out here," Nick said.

The housekeeper was soon under the trees in whose shadow the avenging party had sought concealment, and she fairly sobbed with delight at seeing Ella alive before her.

"No time for sentiment now," Nick laughingly said, a minute later. "Can you tell us if all the servants are abed?"

"They are."

"Where is Mrs. Jarbeau?"

"In her room."

"Can we get into the house and into the room adjoining her's without detection?"

The housekeeper was dubious about this, but Ella believed it could be done.

"Then we will try it," Nick said.

Two men were ordered to a station under some trees that would enable them to keep Mrs. Jarbeau's window in sight. At the first sound of a fracas they were to take up their stations beneath the window.

The remainder of the party, except the boy, entered the house, and by taking off their shoes reached the room adjoining Sarah Blake's without creating a suspicion of their presence.

By reason of the register which had been a friend to Ella it was possible, by giving close attention, to hear nearly all that was said in Sarah Blake's room—which had two occupants, the woman and Barney McCoy.

The tone of the man's voice was sufficient to indicate that he felt gloomy and depressed.

"Tell you what it is, Addie," he said, slowly, "I don't altogether like the looks of things. I'm sorry that girl had to be harmed."

"It couldn't be helped," she cried. "I can't get hold of things as I want them for two weeks to come, and she had to be got out of the way."

"She might have been shut up somewheres."

"Shutting up ain't safe. She's dead, and won't trouble us; that's enough. And when we're making old Jarbeau's money fly on the other side of the water, her death won't trouble us much."

"I dare say not," Barney muttered. "But I don't like it, all the same. You'd ought to a' got hold of the cash, and been ready to skip over the water as soon as I got away from Sing Sing."

"I didn't count on so much delay, and—— What's that? It's a ring at the bell. I wonder who it can be, and what is wanted."

There was a visible trace of trepidation in McCoy's tone, as he said:

"Oh! somebody's made a mistake, that's all."

"I suppose I'll have to go down, as all the servants are in bed," remarked Sarah Blake.

On reaching the landing she halted, as the housekeeper called up the stairs:

"I'll go, madam. I haven't retired yet."

The caller was Hiram Leddy, who, seeing his usual signal disregarded, and seeing a light in Sarah's room, had rung the bell.

Acting under instructions from Nick, the housekeeper, when Leddy inquired for Mrs. Blake, said:

"You know her room, I think. Go right upstairs, sir."

Leddy did so.

He met Sarah at the head of the stairs, but no word was uttered until they entered her room, and the door was closed. Then she said:

"How's this? What are you doing in the city to-night?"

"A pretty question to ask me," he said, in an off-hand tone.

"Because you sent for me."

"Sent for you? I did nothing of the kind."

"But you did. I got your note this morning early."

McCoy began to pace the floor with nervous stride, his lips twitching peculiarly now and then.

"I never wrote the note. Where is it?"

"I destroyed it for safety."

"What did it say?"

"To be here at twelve to-night to see you on something of importance."

"Yet I never wrote such a note."

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know."

"What does it mean?"

"Simply this," she returned in a strident voice, "that the secret we supposed was known to us three alone has been penetrated by another."

The prison guard gasped:

"Lost!"

The woman, who had been the leading spirit in the scheme, who had before shown any quantity of pluck and daring, in face of this sudden revelation broke down completely.

She dropped in a chair and rasped out a few words of potent meaning:

"That letter was a decoy! In all probability this house is surrounded by officers of the law!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CORNERED.

Both her male confederates recognized the force of the conclusion she had reached.

Barney McCoy gnashed his teeth like some wild animal at bay.

The prison guard grew white as a corpse, and his teeth began to chatter like castanets.

"Oh, Lord!" he wailed, "I was always afraid it would turn out this way. Oh! why did I ever lift a finger to help you! Now it's come out and they'll hang me—ugh! hang me, did you hear? But no—they can't hang me—no, no! It's you they'll hang, Barney; it was you who fired the shot, while I held the lamp."

"Shut up," yelled Barney, "or I'll brain you!"

Just then the door opened and a figure glided in before them.

The guilty woman gave a shrick, and covered her face in her hands.

"Don't you know me, Mrs. Martin?" Ella Jarbeau quietly asked.

"Go away—away, I say!—you are dead!" screamed the woman.

"No, I am not dead, thanks to Nick Carter!"

Barney McCoy had been glaring in the direction of the doorway. He now saw a figure resolve itself from the gloom, and with a yell, he sprang to the window.

"Back, there, or we shoot!" came a command from the lawn below.

The wretch recoiled dismayed, and before he could recover himself, the handcuffs were on his wrists.

The prison guard did not offer resistance in any form, but kept on repeating:

"I didn't fire the shot. Barney McCoy did that, and they'll hang him, not me."

The woman suddenly raised her head, and there was a flash of defiance in her eyes.

"You may charge what you please," she said, "but you can prove nothing!"

"Do you think so? Listen, while I tell you how I traced every step."

And Nick informed her of his discoveries.

McCoy listened to the recital with distended eyes. When the last word had fallen from Nick's lips, he asked, huskily:

"Are you man or devil?"

Leddy had listened with chills creeping up and down his spinal column, and when the end came, was shivering like a man with the ague.

"I want to turn State's evidence," he cried, wildly. "I claim the first chance."

The woman was like a corpse in pallor and her lips were blue. In a strained voice, she said:

"You have worked up a strong case."

Realizing the folly of contesting such evidence, all three confessed their guilt.

Addie McCoy's confession filled in many points in Nick's case and served to make it complete.

She said:

"Soon after I married Barney McCoy, he was caught in a crime and sent to Sing Sing. I paid a visit to my Sister Sarah, who was sick in Boston. My sister died, and I took possession of her effects, among which I found a certificate of her marriage to Enos Jarbeau.

"On that certificate I hatched my plot. I would personate my Sister Sarah. My husband was in prison. I went to him and told him of my scheme, to carry out which he must escape. Hiram Leddy, in consideration of helping McCoy to escape and future services, was taken into partnership. In due time our plans matured.

"Then came such an opportunity as I could not have hoped for. The housekeeper here was desirous of absenting herself for a month, and advertised for somebody to fill her place. I saw the advertisement, answered it, obtained the place, remained here a month. A false key enabled me to pry among Mr. Jarbeau's papers, and I discovered where his will was located. I obtained fac-similes of the signatures of the witnesses, and among us a forged will was made.

"Now McCoy escaped. On the night of Mr. Jarbeau's death a man met him a short distance from here and asked him for a light for his cigar. Shortly afterward McCoy was joined by Leddy.

"They entered the house and reached Mr. Jarbeau's room without being detected. They had with them a bottle of chloroform bought of Migglethorpe, and with this the old man was stupefied. Then a pistol was placed in his hand and his arm was lifted to make sure what position the shot would be fired from by a man committing suicide. This being determined, Leddy held a light while McCoy shot the old man. There was no report, for 'silent' powder had been used. A revolver from which one bullet—of the same caliber—had been fired, was laid on the floor. A letter, written before coming here, on paper and with ink different from anything in the house, was placed on the table. The true will was taken from its hiding place, and the forged one substituted. Then they left the house, and Hiram Leddy reported at the prison for duty at twelve the next day. That is the history of our crime."

This confession had been made in the hope of gaining mercy.

Justice was done them instead.

McCoy was electrocuted.

Addie McCoy, as was her name properly, went to Sing Sing for life, as also did the former prison guard, Hiram Leddy.

The true will of Mr. Jarbeau had been destroyed, but this was a matter of no consequence, as Ella, being the only living relation, inherited everything, the same as if the will had been in existence.

The two villains employed by Addie McCoy, one as coachman, the other as a spy in general, are serving out terms in prison.

As for Nick, the size of his reward in bringing Miss Jarbeau into her own ran into five figures.

THE END.

The next number, 339, will contain "Nick Carter and the Living Mask; or, Murdered Without a Mark." In all his wide experience Nick Carter never struck a trail that offered such meager clews to work on. Murder after murder was reported and yet not a trace of the criminal or criminals could be found. How the celebrated detective started in to find the murderer and the sensational *exposé* that resulted was the talk of two continents when the story of his secret work came out. Next week's issue will contain the full details of this remarkable case.

STORIES OF MYSTERY.

This is the last week of this present contest.
So get in your stories of mystery just as soon as possible.
The mystery of the thirty-five successful contestants will soon be solved.
Those books are well worth winning.
For full particulars, see page 31.
A new contest will be announced next week.

Lost and Found.

(By T. E. McGann, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

My father is a mailman and gets paid every month. One summer night in August he came home after delivering his last mail and put his salary in the dresser in his room. He then retired, because he had a sick headache all day and felt that a good sleep would cure him. He slept well all night, but was astonished when he went for his money and found it all gone. Mother and I hunted the house all day for it, but to no avail. The summer, autumn and winter had passed. Spring came, and we were going to move. When we were about to throw out some rubbish, I found a roll of seventy-five dollars under the carpet in my father's room. How it came there remains to be found out.

The Unsolved Mystery.

(By James F. Hughes, New York City.)

Many years ago, in a little town called Weston, there lived an old man named Bob Burton, who was supposed to be the wealthiest man in the community. He was very miserly, and every one despised him on that account. Had any of his enemies known where he concealed his money, they would have stolen it and left him penniless. The fear that some one would do this made the old man live in constant terror, but did not take away the pleasure he felt when, under cover of night, he would count his gold, and let it run through his fingers in a glittering stream. He deprived himself of many things he needed, in order to add to his bright hoard.

One night, as he was about to retire, he heard the muffled click of repeated blows of a hammer on a chisel. Hastily concealing his treasure, he slipped to the door, noiselessly in his worn shoes, and threw it open, peering out into the darkness. He was immediately grasped by a pair of brawny arms, and he and his assailant grappled fiercely in the darkness.

But the old man was feeble. His miserly life had not left him strength to guard his treasure. No one was there to help him. His unseen opponent had a grip like iron. He was helpless in the struggle against the force of his foe. In a few moments he fell to the ground, dead.

Several days afterward a passerby, seeing the battered door standing open, ventured in. There lay the old miser, dead, with a dagger through his heart. With a cry of horror, the discoverer hurried from the room, and making for the courthouse, which was near, told of his grewsome find to the detectives.

Without another word, four of the department's most trusted men hastened to the tumble-down old house where the miser once lived, and found him there, as the man had described. They felt his head. It was cold. Leaving him, they searched the rest of the house, finding everything ransacked. The old man's life and treasure were both gone, where, no one could say.

In spite of a rigid investigation, the detectives could not get the slightest clew as to the identity of the old man's mysterious assailant. Who killed him and why he did it, remain a dark secret to this day.

The Express Car Robbery.

(By H. Q. Ten Eyck, Tompkins Cove, N. Y.)

In the year 18—, on the B. R. & T. Railroad, the robbing of express cars became so frequent that the company hired detectives to try and trace the robbers, but all in vain.

A young man, named John T. Brooks, volunteered to act as detective, and after obtaining the permission of the superintendent of the express company, he started out. He had a box built, large enough to admit himself only and be comfortable, and had a secret top on it, so that at any moment he wished to open it he could with very little trouble.

After the train had reached its destination, he opened the safe, and money amounting to $5,000 was gone. So on the next run, he got inside the box and it was shipped as a heavy shipment of gold. After quite some trouble the express company decided to carry it. It was put aboard the train and the train started. After a few minutes waiting and watching, he saw the messenger look cautiously about him and then go over in front of the safe, lift up the mat, open a trapdoor and admit a man.

It seems this man had ridden from the starting point, on the brace-bars of the train, and the messenger supposing he had a heavy shipment of gold, had admitted him to the car. They then went over to the box where Brooks was concealed and started to pry open the box.

At this moment Brooks opened the lid and covered them with his revolvers, and requested them to stand with their backs to the wall. He then tied their hands, or at least, he commanded one of the men to tie the other one's hands and feet, and he—Brooks—tied the first man. Then Brooks charged them with being the means of all the robberies on the road. The messenger being a coward, turned State's evidence and explained how the money disappeared from the safe.

He said that under the mat near the safe door there was a small trapdoor, and when the safe was rolled over this hole, the money could be obtained by means of a hole

cut in the bottom of the safe about ten inches square, and a false plate put in its place and the cracks filled up and covered with shoe blacking. So clever was the place covered that it would take a very close observation to see the least traces of it.

Brooks remembered seeing the messenger roll the safe over on the mat on his first ride, but thought nothing of it, as the man was sweeping the car floor.

The messenger and his partner got ten years each. They also told where all the money was hidden. Brooks was rewarded handsomely for his work.

The Mystery of the Haunted Farm.

(By Arthur Gunn, Spokane, Wash.)

Not far from a small town called Wallace lived a wealthy farmer named Mr. Mott, who had two daughters and a son. His farm was the best around there, the nearest one being half a mile away, where an old miser lived. One night, as Mr. Mott was going out to the barn, he suddenly fell dead from heart disease. Mrs. Mott could not sleep one night some time afterward, and as she looked out of her bedroom window she saw a ghost, which gave three loud yells and then disappeared.

In the morning she told nothing of this to her children, but the next night as the two sisters were coming home they saw it and ran and told their mother and brother.

The ghost did not appear again for two days. Then when the boy was cleaning out the barn, the ghost appeared before him. The boy stood firm with his pitchfork, and said, "Who are you?" and the ghost said, "I am the ghost of your father and want you to sell this farm to any one who will buy it." The boy hesitated a second, and said, "If you are father it won't hurt you, but if you are not damn you," and he thrust the fork into his breast.

He then notified the chief of police, and as the miser, whom it was, lay on the bed dying, he gave a full account of himself, saying that he wished to buy the farm and tried to scare them out by playing ghost. Two hours later he died. Mrs. Mott keeps that fork as a relic in her bedroom.

Still a Mystery.

(By Ernest Feigel, Butler, Pa.)

Great excitement prevailed in the little village of C——. The president of a large steel and iron corporation had been murdered, and a large sum of money had been taken from the safe. The thieves entered by a back way. They proceeded to the front of the building, where they were met by the watchman. They were afraid of his spreading the alarm, so they bound him hand-and-foot and gagged him.

This done they went to the room where the safe was kept. Instead of there being nobody there, as they supposed, they found the president, seated at the desk, looking over some accounts. The thieves made a rush for him, but the president was too quick for them. He arose, but there was no weapon at hand, and he was wholly at their mercy. He thought of the night watchman. He rang a bell, but when he did not appear as usual he became alarmed. During this interval the thieves were conversing together and seemed to come to the conclusion that their plan would suit.

They advanced toward the president, one with a revolver and the other with a sharp knife. He tried to frighten them by telling them that he had obtained help. They did not believe him. One held him, while the other killed him.

They next opened a small leather handbag and produced dynamite. They bored holes into the safe, inserted the dynamite and put a fuse to it. An explosion quickly followed.

In the safe the burglars found many valuable papers and a large sum of money. It was evident that some large sales had been made that day. The burglars took all the money, which amounted to about $300,000, but left the papers untouched. They picked up their tools and put them in the handbag, and started to leave the building the way they had entered it. They went down a street nearby, boarded a street car, and got out at the depot. They took the train for New York City.

The next morning, when the clerks and officers of the works came, they found the villainous work that had been done the night previous. The watchman was questioned closely, but little information was received. Detectives were at once employed upon the case. The thieves, leaving no clew, were never found.

Nick and Bunco Bill.

(By Sam Schwartz, Boston, Mass.)

"So you have come, Mr. Carter?" said Mr. B——, a rich millionaire.

"I have," said Nick Carter.

"I have a hard case for you."

"So the chief of police has told me."

"The case is this: The day before yesterday a man came to my house and asked permission to stay overnight. I told him he might stay, and in the morning I found him dead. He was gagged and bound hand and foot. On the floor I found a piece of paper. Here it is."

Mr. Carter took the paper and read as follows:

"Bunco Bill: I will be at Chicago next Wednesday; meet me down at the Harrow's. Ask for Mr. Fox.

"Dod."

"This is a clew," said Nick, "I will see Bunco Bill at Chicago."

"I hope you will succeed and get the murderer," said Mr. B——.

"By the way, have you searched his pockets?" asked Nick.

"No."

"Well, come along and search him."

At the first glance Nick gave a sudden jump. "Why, that is the detective who helped me on my last case."

On Wednesday a tramp came into Harrow's and asked for Dod.

He was shown into a room where a man was sitting smoking.

"Who are you," asked Dod.

"I am Bunco Bill," said the tramp. He was really Nick Carter.

"I have business with you. I have killed a detective, and there is another detective after me. I want you to kill him. Will you do it?"

"I'm the fellow. How much money in it?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"I'll do it."

They both got up and walked out, and went into another saloon. Here a man came up to Nick and dealt him a blow which made his whiskers come off. Then Dod seeing Nick grabbed him by the collar. Nick gave a peculiar whistle and Chick and three policemen came running in and arrested Dod and the other man. At the trial the man that struck Nick was found to be Bunco Bill. They were sentenced for twenty-five years imprisonment. Nick was given a gold medal by the chief of police.

The Haunted House.

(By Archie Mooney, St. Paul, Minn.)

About four years ago, in the State of Iowa, there stood one of the finest houses ever built. But nobody would sleep overnight in it, for they said they saw ghosts. One night a young man said he would stay in it all night if they would pay him a good price. So all the people said they would give him one hundred dollars to do it.

The next night the people saw him go into the house. When he was in he took two pistols from his pocket and laid them on the table and sat down to read. About midnight he heard a little noise and got up to see what it was. When he got to the door and opened it there stood a ghost. John Black, for that was his name, raised his pistol and fired. It did not move an inch, so John fired again, but did not hit it.

All of a sudden the light that John had with him went out. He looked around to see what did it, and there stood ten ghosts all around him. John aimed and fired both the pistols, but did not hit one. Before he could fire again all the ghosts jumped on him and tied his hands behind his back. None of the ghosts spoke a word to him. When they had him well bound they tied a rag over his eyes and took him away.

In the morning when John did not come out all the people got alarmed and sent word to the police of what had happened. As soon as the police heard it, they sent word to one of the greatest detectives known, and that was Nick Carter, telling him to come at once. At three o'clock in the afternoon Nick arrived with Chick, one of his partners, and started at once on the case. When night came Nick, with Chick, went to stay at the house for the night. Nick and Chick each had two pistols ready for use. Nick and Chick made off as if they were sleeping, and while they were doing it a man came up through a trapdoor in the floor and came toward the table. But Nick and Chick were ready for him. Both grabbed their pistols at the same time, saying, "Move an inch and you are a dead man." The man held his hands above his head till they were tied together. Then Nick asked him what he was doing in the house.

"I came up to put blanks in your pops, so when others came up you could not shoot them. I did that to the other one, and that was why he could not hit us."

"What were you doing down where you came from?"

"There are ten of us all together, and we are making money. You fellows are not so smart as you think you are."

"Chick," said Nick, "run to the police house and get fifteen policemen. The others won't come up till this one goes down. Get back as soon as you can."

"If you will go down and tell them it is all right up here I will let you go when I get the others."

The man swore he would do as Nick wanted him to do. In ten minutes Chick was back with the policemen. Nick made them get into the closet that was in the room and wait. Nick then let the man go to tell the others it was all right.

In a little while Nick heard a noise at the door and went to see what it was. It was the same thing John saw when he went to the door. Nick raised his pistol and fired, and the ghost dropped to the floor without a noise. The light went out as before, and when Nick looked around there stood ten ghosts. Nick gave a quick signal and all the policemen came out of the closet and put the irons on the men, for they were the ghosts. The policemen took them all to the lockup but the one that came up first.

"Now," said Nick, "tell me your story."

The man told all. He said that a man had a silver mine and could not get what he wanted for it, and so he made money out of it. When Nick got down into the cellar he saw about $1,000 worth of presses and things. He found John locked in a little room and let him out.

A week or so later it was found out that one dollar that they had made had too much silver in it. The man who owned the house gave Nick $5,000 for what he had done, for he was a millionaire.

All the fellows got twenty years.

Nick and Chick went back to New York to work at another case.

Five Hundred Dollars Reward.

(By Frank J. Taylor, Chicago, Ill.)

"Five hundred dollars to the one that finds my safe!" cried Mr. Taylor, of the firm of Taylor & Preussner.

"Who finds your safe? Why, man, have you gone crazy? If I remember rightly, your safe was three times as big as mine." And the chief of police pointed to a safe in the corner of the room. "Hence it could not go through the door. But how did you get it into your office? First tell me all about the case, though."

"Why, it is simply this: When I get down in the morning everything is in perfect order, but my safe is gone. I asked the janitor if he heard any noise, or anything suspicious during the night, and he said he heard nothing. I can't understand it. It took five men to get the safe into the office and they had to take it in on its side."

Tim Ryan, a lad who was employed by the chief to keep his office clean, was in at the time. He heard the talk, and no sooner had Mr. Taylor left than he followed. He went home and told his father, who was an old man, about the new case of the chief. After hearing his story, Mr. Ryan said, "Tim, do you want to earn that $500? I'll tell you how to do it."

Tim assured his father that he did.

"Well, then, that place was once a counterfeiters' den. There is a secret door in the wall. It is operated by a little silver button placed in the wall. I suppose it will be black with age now. Find that button in the wall and you will find Mr. Taylor's safe."

Tim at once started out for the office of Taylor & Preussner. It was some time before Mr. Taylor decided to let him have the use of the room for half an hour, but finally he did.

Left alone, Tim ran his hand along the wall until it was black as the ace of spades, but at last he found the button, which was set in the middle of a flower. He pressed upon it and immediately a part of the wall flew back, and he looked into a room, with walls of sheet iron. Indeed it was a fit place for a counterfeiters' den, and in the middle of the room stood a safe, while alongside of it lay the body of Mr. Preussner, who was at the moment believed to be in New York. He called Mr. Taylor in, who at once sent for the coroner.

The coroner said that Preussner had burst a blood vessel and died. While in New York, Preussner took to gambling and lost all he had. He had by some means discovered the secret room and he decided to steal the safe, for he knew Mr. Taylor had secured $10,000, with which he was going to buy a house.

Tim Ryan got twice the reward offered. He is now a great detective.

Strangely Met.

(By Sam Bokritzky, Atlanta, Ga.)

"Doctor, give me ten cents worth of paris green, the worst you have."

This remark was made by a rather pretty girl to a druggist in Atlanta. The druggist, a handsome chap, of about twenty, looked at her and said:

"Miss, judging from your looks, you are but eighteen years old, so I can't sell you such poison without a doctor's prescription."

"But I want it for insects," and she tried hard to make her sad face look happy. As the doctor looked at her smiling countenance his face paled and he seemed to labor under a heavy load.

"This was my last smile I had received from her when we parted," he muttered. But quickly recovering himself, he said:

"May I ask your name and under what circumstances you are? I might be able to help you."

She thought hard for about five minutes, and raising her pretty eyes, said:

"Yes, I will tell you my story. Two years ago my poor old father, who was a rich man, was arrested for forgery. Although not guilty he was sentenced for ten years in the penitentiary. The same month my brother, who swore to find proofs of my father's innocence, disappeared mysteriously. I was then left alone in the world, my mother having died a year previous. For two years I had struggled with this hard and cruel world until now, looking for my brother, who was then a medical student. But not finding him I resolved to take my life."

And as she looked at him he was pale as a ghost, his eyes were full of tears, and he seemed about to fall.

"It is she," he hoarsely shouted, and looking her in the face, added, "Edna, my sister."

With one bound of joy she was in his arms with tears in her eyes, saying, "Louis, my brother."

After the first joy Louis told her that first he finished his medical course, which took him six months. And since then he had found evidence to prove his father's innocence.

Two months later their father was out of prison, and his past partner took his place, he being the guilty party. After recovering his fortune Louis married a refined lady, and Edna was also happily married. They bought a beautiful mansion on Peachtree Street, where they are living happily to this day.

A False Theory.

(By H. H. Wood, Tahlequah, Ind. Ter.)

When Thomas Lawson, of Romana, I. T., was found all mangled and bleeding on a lonely road, all supposed he was thrown from his horse, a spirited animal, and dragged until dead.

As this sometimes happens, all believed it, never stopping to consider his wounds nor the traces left. So he was buried and forgot, except by his family, especially his brother, who had been called from college for the last ceremony. But the death of Tom lay so heavily on Clayton's mind, when he returned to school, that on the following vacation he investigated the death and found the following facts:

First—Tom had a wound on his left leg, that looked more like a cut than a bruise.

Second—The road afterward gave no indications of a body being dragged over it.

Third—Tom's horse was also cut on the side.

Considering these facts, Clayton did not see how it could have happened. So he stayed around the place a long time, and one evening while in a valley below the road, he saw Mike Arnard, a bitter enemy of his dead brother, approaching.

Quickly concealing himself, Clayton watched Mike, who was shaking his head and muttering to himself.

On reaching the spot, Mike threw up his hands deploringly, and said, "Oh, will I never get over this deed?"

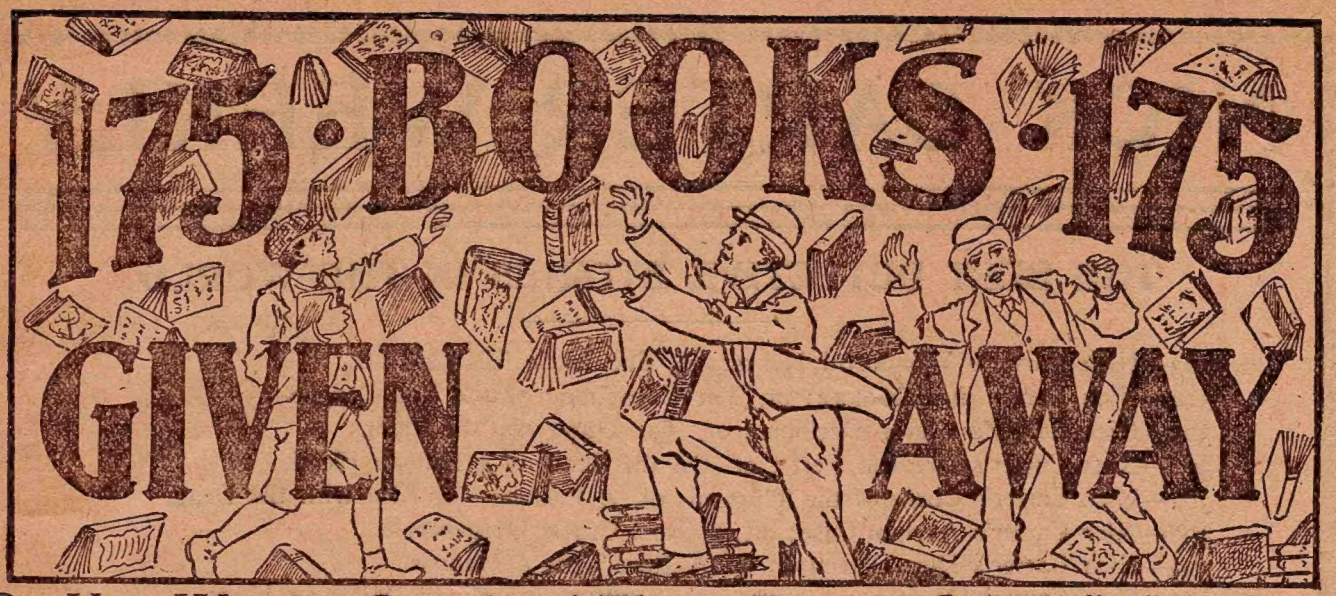
At this Clayton stepped out, saying, "What deed, my friend?"

Mike wheeled around with glittering eyes, made a lunge at Clayton, with the words, "You demon, I will finish you as I did your brother!"

Clayton stepped aside, and Mike went crashing to the death awaiting him below the precipice. Clayton hurried down around the abyss, and lifted Mike, who uttered this confession before he died:

"I killed your brother. I always hated him. I met him one day out there, drew my knife, plunging it through the flesh of his left leg into the horse's side underneath. At this the horse jumped, throwing Tom to the ground. Then I ended him as God is ending me."

As Mike closed, Clayton looked up, to behold Sheriff Macking, who said, "I have heard all. He is your brother's murderer, and you are his finder."



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The ten boys who send in the next best stories will each receive any Four Books they may select in this list :: :: :: :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

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